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GREEN GODDESS

A Play in Four Acts

By WILLIAM ARCHER

"A CRITIC of other dramatists, Mr. Archer gives us *The Green Goddess* as his first play insofar as we know, for if he has written others he has kept them to himself. If he has, I hope the success of this presumably maiden effort will cause him to bring them forward. It is a notable achievement to have been associated with and a close student of the theatre for some forty-five years and to have desisted from writing a play. Mr. Archer is credited with having said that he could not write one. After reading *The Green Goddess* I am compelled to say that he gave himself the lie.

"The play is a ripping melodrama of the technique you would expect from its authoritative author. As to its elements, it contains battle, murder, and sudden death, not to mention the raja who goes in for modern improvements with the exception of aeroplanes."—J. VANDERVOORT SLOAN in *The Drama.*

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THE GREEN GODDESS

THE ART THEATER

BY SHELDON CHENEY

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

by

WILLIAM ARCHER

NEW YORK
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1926

Archer

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Third printing

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

I dedicate this play
To WINTHROP AMES
To whom it owes
so much

"The Green Goddess" was first acted in Philadelphia, on the occasion of the opening of the reconstructed Walnut Street Theatre, 27 December, 1920. It was produced in New York, at the Booth Theatre, 18 January, 1921, with the following cast (practically the same as in Philadelphia):

The Raja	*George Arliss*
Watkins	*Ivan F. Simpson*
Major Crespin	*Herbert Waring*
Lucilla	*Olive Wyndham*
Dr. Traherne	*Cyril Keightley*
Lieut. Cardew	*Herbert Ranson*
The High Priest	*David A. Leonard*
The Temple Priest	*Ronald Colman*
An Ayah	*Helen Nowell*

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

The Raja of Rukh (40)
Watkins, his valet (35)
Major Antony Crespin, (40)
Lucilla, his wife (28)
Doctor Basil Traherne (35)
Lieutenant Denis Cardew (23)
Priests, villagers, regular and irregular troops, servants and an unseen multitude.
Scene: A remote region at the back of the Himalayas.

THE GREEN GODDESS

THE GREEN GODDESS

ACT FIRST

A region of gaunt and almost treeless mountains, uniformly grey in tone, except in so far as the atmosphere lends them colour. Clinging to the mountain wall in the background, at an apparent distance of about a mile, is a vast barbaric palace, with long stretches of unbroken masonry, crowned by arcades and turrets.

The foreground consists of a small level space between two masses of rock. In the rock on the right a cave-temple has been roughly hewn. Two thick and rudely-carved pillars divide it into three sections. Between the pillars, in the middle section, can be seen the seated figure of a six-armed Goddess, of forbidding aspect, coloured dark green. In front of the figure is a low altar with five or six newly-severed heads of goats lying at its base. The temple is decorated with untidy and mouldering wreaths and other floral offerings.*

The open space between the two rock masses forms a rudely-paved forecourt to the temple. It is bordered by smaller idols and three or four round-headed stone posts, painted green.

Mountain paths wind off behind the rocks, and through the low shrubs, both to right and left.

* From the point of view of the audience.

Projecting over the rock-mass on the left can be seen the wing of an aeroplane, the nacelle and under-carriage hidden. It has evidently just made a rather disastrous forced landing.

The pilot and two passengers are in the act of extricating themselves from the wreck, and clambering down the cliff. The pilot is DR. BASIL TRAHERNE; *the passengers are* MAJOR ANTONY CRESPIN *and his wife* LUCILLA. TRAHERNE (35) *is a well set-up man, vigorous and in good training.* CRESPIN (40), *somewhat heavy and dissipated-looking, is in khaki.* LUCILLA (28) *is a tall, slight, athletic woman, wearing a tailor-made tweed suit. All three on their first appearance wear aviation helmets and leather coats. The coats they take off as occasion offers.*

Their proceedings are watched with wonder and fear by a group of dark and rudely-clad natives, rather Mongolian in feature. They chatter eagerly among themselves. A man of higher stature and more Aryan type, the PRIEST *of the temple, seems to have some authority over them.*

As soon as all three newcomers have descended, the PRIEST *gives some directions to a young man among the bystanders, who makes off at great speed. He is a messenger to the castle.*

LUCILLA. [*To* CRESPIN, *who is at a difficult point, and about to jump.*] Take care, Antony! Let Dr. Traherne give you a hand.

TRAHERNE. [*Already on the ground.*] Yes.

CRESPIN. Hang it all, I'm not such a crock as all that. [*Jumps heavily, but safely.*]

TRAHERNE. Are you all right, Mrs. Crespin? Not very much shaken?

LUCILLA. Not a bit.

TRAHERNE. It was a nasty bump.

LUCILLA. You managed splendidly.

CRESPIN. Come on, Lu—sit on that ledge, and I can swing you down.

TRAHERNE. Let me—

[CRESPIN *and* TRAHERNE *support her as she jumps lightly to the ground.*]

LUCILLA. Thank you.

CRESPIN. That last ten minutes was pretty trying. I don't mind owning that my nerves are all of a twitter. [*Producing a pocket flask, and pouring some of its contents into the cup.*] Have a mouthful, Traherne?

TRAHERNE. No, thank you.

CRESPIN. [*To* LUCILLA.] You won't, I know. I will. [*Drinks off the brandy, then pours and drinks again.*] That's better!—And now—where are we, Doctor?

TRAHERNE. I have no notion.

CRESPIN. Let's ask the populace.

[*The natives have been standing at some distance, awe-struck, but chattering eagerly among themselves. The* PRIEST, *intently watching, is silent.* CRESPIN *advances towards him, the natives meanwhile shrinking back in fear. The* PRIEST *salaams slightly and almost contemptuously.* CRESPIN *addresses him in Hindustani, which he evidently does not understand. He in turn pours forth a speech of some length, pointing to the temple and the palace.* CRESPIN *can make nothing of it. While this is proceeding:*

TRAHERNE. [*In a low voice, to* LUCILLA.] You were splendid, all through!

LUCILLA. I had perfect faith in you.

TRAHERNE. If I'd had another pint of petrol, I might

have headed for that sort of esplanade behind the castle—

LUCILLA. Yes, I saw it.

TRAHERNE. —and made an easy landing. But I simply h a d to try for this place, and trust to luck.

LUCILLA. It wasn't luck, but your skill, that saved us.

TRAHERNE. You are very good to me.

CRESPIN. [*Turning.*] It's no use—he doesn't understand a word of Hindustani. You know Russian, don't you, Doctor?

TRAHERNE. A little.

CRESPIN. We must be well on towards Central Asia. Suppose you try him in Russian. Ask him where the hell we are, and who owns the shooting-box up yonder. [TRAHERNE *says something to the* PRIEST *in Russian.*]

THE PRIEST. [*His face lighting up, points to the earth, and then makes an enveloping gesture to signify the whole country, saying:*] Rukh, Rukh, Rukh, Rukh.

CRESPIN. What the deuce is he Rooking about?

TRAHERNE. Goodness knows.

LUCILLA. I believe I know. Wait a minute. [*Feeling in her pockets.*] I thought I had the paper with me. I read in the *Leader,* just before we started, that the three men who murdered the Political Officer at Abdulabad came from a wild region at the back of the Himalayas, called Rukh.

TRAHERNE. Now that you mention it, I h a v e heard of the place. [*He turns to the* PRIEST *and says a few more words in Russian, pointing to the palace. The* PRIEST *replies "Raja Sahib" several times over.*]

CRESPIN. Oh, it's Windsor Castle, is it? Well, we'd better make tracks for it. Come, Lucilla. [*The* PRIEST, *much excited, stops his way, pouring forth a stream*

of unintelligible language. TRAHERNE *says something to him in Russian, whereupon he pauses and then says two or three words, slowly and with difficulty—one of them "Raja."*]

TRAHERNE. His Russian is even more limited than mine; but I gather that the Raja has been sent for and will come here.

CRESPIN. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] All right—then we'd better await developments. [*Seats himself on a green-painted stone. As the* PRIEST *sees this, he makes a rush, hustles* CRESPIN *off, with wild exclamations, and then, disregarding him, makes propitiatory gestures, and mutters formulas of deprecation, to the stone.*]

CRESPIN. [*Very angry, lays his hand on his revolver-case.*] Confound you, take care what you're doing! You'd better treat us civilly, or—

TRAHERNE. [*Laying a hand on his arm.*] Gently, gently, Major. This is evidently some sort of sacred enclosure, and you were sitting on one of the gods.

CRESPIN. Well, damn him, he might have told me—

TRAHERNE. If he had you wouldn't have understood. The fellow seems to be the priest—you see, he's begging the god's pardon.

CRESPIN. If I knew his confounded lingo I'd jolly well make him beg mine.

TRAHERNE. We'd better be careful not to tread on their corns. We have Mrs. Crespin to think of.

CRESPIN. Damn it, sir, do you think I don't know how to take care of my own wife?

TRAHERNE. I think you're a little hasty, Major—that's all. These are evidently queer people, and we're dependent on them to get us out of our hobble.

LUCILLA. [*Down, left.*] Do you think I could sit on this stone without giving offence to the deities?

TRAHERNE. Oh, yes, that seems safe enough. [*After* LUCILLA *is seated.*] I don't know how to apologize for having got you into this mess.

LUCILLA. Don't talk nonsense, Dr. Traherne. Who can foresee a Himalayan fog?

TRAHERNE. The only thing to do was to get above it, and then, of course, my bearings were gone.

LUCILLA. Now that we're safe, I should think it all great fun if it weren't for the children.

CRESPIN. Oh, they don't expect us for a week, and surely it won't take us more than that to get back to civilization.

TRAHERNE. Or, at all events, to a telegraph line.

LUCILLA. I suppose there's no chance of flying back?

TRAHERNE. Not the slightest, I'm afraid. I fancy the old 'bus is done for.

LUCILLA. Oh, Dr. Traherne, what a shame! And you'd only had it a few weeks!

TRAHERNE. What does it matter so long as y o u are safe?

LUCILLA. What does it matter so long as we're a l l safe?

CRESPIN. That's not what Traherne said. Why pretend to be blind to his—chivalry?

TRAHERNE. [*Trying to laugh it off.*] Of course I'm glad you're all right, Major, and I'm not sorry to be in a whole skin myself. But ladies first, you know.

CRESPIN. The perfect knight errant, in fact!

TRAHERNE. Decidedly "errant." I couldn't well have gone more completely astray.

LUCILLA. Won't you look at the machine and see if it's quite hopeless?

TRAHERNE. Yes, at once. [*He goes towards the wreck of the aeroplane and passes out of sight. The popu-*

lace clustered in and around the temple on the right are intent upon the marvel of the aeroplane, but the PRIEST *fixes his gaze upon* CRESPIN *and* LUCILLA.]

CRESPIN. [*Sits beside* LUCILLA *on the stone.*] Well, Lucilla!

LUCILLA. Well?

CRESPIN. That was a narrow squeak.

LUCILLA. Yes, I suppose so.

CRESPIN. All's well that ends well, eh?

LUCILLA. Of course.

CRESPIN. You don't seem very grateful to Providence.

LUCILLA. For sending the fog?

CRESPIN. For getting us down safely—all three.

LUCILLA. It was Dr. Traherne's nerve that did that. If he hadn't kept his head—

CRESPIN. We should have crashed. One or other of us would probably have broken his neck; and if Providence had played up, it might have been the right one.

LUCILLA. What do you mean?

CRESPIN. It might have been me. Then you'd have thanked God, right enough!

LUCILLA. Why w i l l you talk like this, Antony? If I hadn't sent Dr. Traherne away just now, you'd have been saying these things in his hearing.

CRESPIN. Well, why not? He's quite one of the family! Don't tell me he doesn't know all about the "state of our relations," as they say in the divorce court.

LUCILLA. If he does, it's not from me. No doubt he knows what the whole station knows.

CRESPIN. And what does the whole station know? Why, that your deadly coldness drives me to drink. I've lived for three years in an infernal clammy fog like that we passed through. Who's to blame if I take a

whiskey-peg now and then, to keep the chill out?

LUCILLA. Oh, Antony, why go over it all again? You know very well it was drink—and other things—that came between us; not my coldness, as you call it, that drove you to drink.

CRESPIN. Oh, you good women! You patter after the parson "Forgive us as we forgive those that trespass against us." But you don't know what forgiveness means.

LUCILLA. What's the use of it, Antony? Forgive? I h a v e "forgiven" you. I don't try to take the children from you, though it might be better for them if I did. But to forgive is one thing, to forget another. When a woman has seen a man behave as you have behaved, do you think it is possible for her to forget it, and to love him afresh? There are women in novels, and perhaps in the slums, who have such short memories; but I am not one of them.

CRESPIN. No, by God, you're not! So a man's whole life is to be ruined—

LUCILLA. Do you think yours is the only life to be ruined?

CRESPIN. Ah, there we have it! I've not only offended your sensibilities; I am in your way. You love this other man, this model of all the virtues!

LUCILLA. You have no right to say that.

CRESPIN. [*Disregarding her protest.*] He's a paragon. He's a wonder. He's a mighty microbe-killer before the Lord; he's going to work Heaven knows what miracles, only he hasn't brought them off yet. And you're cursing the mistake you made in marrying a poor devil of a soldier-man instead of a first-class scientific genius. Come! Make a clean breast of it! You may as well!

LUCILLA. I have nothing to answer. While I continue to live with you, I owe you an account of my actions—but not of my thoughts.

CRESPIN. Your actions? Oh, I know very well you're too cold—too damned respectable—to kick over the traces. And then you have the children to think of.

LUCILLA. Yes; I have the children. . .

CRESPIN. Besides, there's no hurry. If you only have patience for a year or two, I'll do the right thing for once, and drink myself to death.

LUCILLA. You have only to keep yourself a little in hand to live to what they call "a good old age."

CRESPIN. 'Pon my soul, I've a mind to try to, though goodness knows my life is not worth living. I was a fool to come on this crazy expedition—

LUCILLA. Why, it was you yourself that jumped at Dr. Traherne's proposal.

CRESPIN. I thought we'd get to the kiddies a week earlier. T h e y ' d be glad to see me, poor little things. T h e y don't despise their daddy.

LUCILLA. It shan't be my fault, Antony, if they ever do. But you don't make it easy to keep up appearances.

CRESPIN. Oh, Lu, Lu, if you would treat me like a human being—if you would help me and make life tolerable for me, instead of a thing that won't bear looking at except through the haze of drink—we might retrieve the early days. God knows I never cared two pins for any woman but you—

LUCILLA. No, the others, I suppose, only helped you, like whiskey, to see the world through a haze. *I* saw the world through a haze when I married you; but you have dispelled it once for all. Don't force me to tell you how impossible it is for me to be

your wife again. I am the mother of your children —that gives you a terrible hold over me. Be content with that.

TRAHERNE. [*Still unseen, calls:*] Oh, Mrs. Crespin! [*He appears, clambering down from the aeroplane.*] I've found in the wreck the newspaper you spoke of—you were right about Rukh.

CRESPIN. [*As* TRAHERNE *comes forward.*] What does it say?

TRAHERNE. [*Reads.*] "Abdulabad, Tuesday. Sentence of death has been passed on the three men found guilty of the murder of Mr. Haredale. It appears that these miscreants are natives of Rukh, a small and little-known independent state among the northern spurs of the Himalayas."

LUCILLA. Yes, that's what I read.

TRAHERNE. This news isn't the best possible passport for us in our present situation.

LUCILLA. But if we're hundreds of miles from anywhere, it can't be known here yet.

CRESPIN. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] In any case, they wouldn't dare to molest us.

TRAHERNE. All the same it might be safest to burn this paragraph in case there's anybody here that can read it. [*He tears a strip out of the paper, lights it at* CRESPIN'S *match, watches it burn till he has to drop the flaming remnant of it, upon which he stamps.* LUCILLA *takes the rest of the small local paper and lays it beside her leather coat on the stone, left. The* PRIEST *intently watches all these proceedings.*]

[*Meanwhile strange ululations, mingled with the throb of tom-toms and the clash of cymbals,*

have made themselves faintly heard from the direction of the mountain path, right.]

CRESPIN. Hallo! What's this?

TRAHERNE. Sounds like the march of the Great Panjandrum.

[*The sounds rapidly approach. The natives all run to the point where the path debouches on the open space. They prostrate themselves, some on each side of the way. A wild procession comes down the mountain path. It is headed by a gigantic negro flourishing two naked sabres, and gyrating in a barbaric war-dance. Then come half a dozen musicians with tom-toms and cymbals. Then a litter carried by four bearers. Through its gauze curtains the figure of the* RAJA *can be indistinctly seen. Immediately behind the litter comes* WATKINS, *an English valet, demure and correct, looking as if he had just strolled in from St. James Street. The procession closes with a number of the* RAJA'S *bodyguard, in the most fantastic, parti-coloured attire, and armed with antique match-locks, some of them with barrels six or seven feet long. The* RAJA'S *litter is set down in front of the temple.* WATKINS *opens the curtains and gives his arm to the* RAJA *as he alights. The* RAJA *makes a step towards the European party in silence. He is a tall, well-built man of forty, dressed in the extreme of Eastern gorgeousness.* CRESPIN *advances and salutes.*]

CRESPIN. Does Your Highness speak English?

RAJA. Oh, yes, a little. [*As a matter of fact he speaks it irreproachably.*]

CRESPIN. [*Pulling himself together and speaking like*

a soldier and a man of breeding.] Then I have to apologize for our landing uninvited in your territory.

RAJA. Uninvited, but, I assure you, not unwelcome.

CRESPIN. We are given to understand that this is the State of Rukh.

RAJA. The kingdom of Rukh, Major—if I rightly read the symbols on your cuff.

CRESPIN. [*Again salutes.*] Major Crespin. Permit me to introduce my wife—

RAJA. [*With a profound salaam.*] I am delighted, Madam, to welcome you to my secluded dominions. You are the first lady of your nation I have had the honour of receiving.

LUCILLA. Your Highness is very kind.

CRESPIN. And this is Dr. Basil Traherne, whose aeroplane—or what is left of it—you see.

RAJA. Doctor Traherne? T h e Doctor Traherne, whose name I have so often seen in the newspaper? "The Pasteur of Malaria."

TRAHERNE. The newspapers make too much of my work. It is very incomplete.

RAJA. But you are an aviator as well?

TRAHERNE. Only as an amateur.

RAJA. I presume it is some misadventure—a most fortunate misadventure for me—that has carried you so far into the wilds of the Himalayas?

TRAHERNE. Yes—we got lost in the clouds. Major and Mrs. Crespin were coming up from the plains to see their children at a hill station—

RAJA. Pahari, no doubt?

TRAHERNE. Yes, Pahari—and I was rash enough to suggest that I might save them three days' travelling by taking them up in my aeroplane.

RAJA. Madam is a sportswoman, then?

LUCILLA. Oh, I have been up many times.

CRESPIN. [*With a tinge of sarcasm.*] Yes, many times.

LUCILLA. It was no fault of Dr. Traherne's that we went astray. The weather was impossible.

RAJA. Well, you have made a sensation here, I can assure you. My people have never seen an aeroplane. They are not sure—simple souls—whether you are gods or demons. But the fact of your having descended in the precincts of a temple of our local goddess—[*With a wave of his hand towards the idol.*] allow me to introduce you to her—is considered highly significant.

CRESPIN. I hope, sir, that we shall find no difficulty in obtaining transport back to civ—to India.

RAJA. To civilization, you were going to say? Why hesitate, my dear sir? We know very well that we are barbarians. We are quite reconciled to the fact. We have had some five thousand years to accustom ourselves to it. This sword [*Touching his scimitar.*] is a barbarous weapon compared with your revolver; but it was worn by my ancestors when yours were daubing themselves blue and picking up a precarious livelihood in the woods. [*Breaking off hastily to prevent any reply.*] But Madam is standing all this time! Watkins, what are you thinking of? Some cushions. [WATKINS *piles some cushions from the litter so as to form a seat for* LUCILLA. *Meanwhile the* RAJA *continues.*] Another litter for Madam, and mountain-chairs for the gentlemen, will be here in a few minutes. Then I hope you will accept the hospitality of my poor house.

LUCILLA. We are giving a great deal of trouble, Your Highness.

RAJA. A great deal of pleasure, Madam.

CRESPIN. But I hope, sir, there will be no difficulty about transport back to—India.

RAJA. Time enough to talk of that, Major, when you have rested and recuperated after your adventure. You will do me the honour of dining with me this evening? I trust you will not find us altogether uncivilized.

LUCILLA. [*Lightly.*] Your Highness will have to excuse the barbarism of our attire. We have nothing to wear but what we stand up in.

RAJA. Oh, I think we can put that all right. Watkins!

WATKINS. [*Advancing.*] Your 'Ighness!

RAJA. You are in the confidence of our Mistress of the Robes. How does our wardrobe stand?

WATKINS. A fresh consignment of Paris models come in only last week, Your 'Ighness.

RAJA. Good! Then I hope, Madam, that you may find among them some rag that you will deign to wear.

LUCILLA. Paris models, Your Highness! And you talk of being uncivilized!

RAJA. We do what we can, Madam. I sometimes have the pleasure of entertaining European ladies—though not, hitherto, Englishwomen—in my solitudes; and I like to mitigate the terrors of exile for them. Then as for civilization, you know, I have always at my elbow one of its most finished products. Watkins!

WATKINS. [*Stepping forward.*] Your 'Ighness!

RAJA. You will recognize in Watkins, gentlemen, another representative of the Ruling Race. [WATKINS, *with downcast eyes, touches his hat to* CRESPIN *and* TRAHERNE.] I assure you he rules me with an iron hand—not always in a velvet glove. Eh, Watkins?

WATKINS. Your 'Ighness will 'ave your joke.

RAJA. He is my Prime Minister and all my Cabinet —but more particularly my Lord Chamberlain. No one can touch him at mixing a cocktail or making a salad. My entire household trembles at his nod; even my *chef* quails before him. Nothing comes amiss to him; for he is, like myself, a man without prejudices. You may be surprised at my praising him to his face in this fashion; you may foresee some danger of—what shall I say?—swelled head. But I know my Watkins; there is not the slightest risk of his outgrowing that modest bowler. He knows his value to me, and he knows that he would never be equally appreciated elsewhere. I have guarantees for his fidelity—eh, Watkins?

WATKINS. I know when I'm well off, if that's what Your 'Ighness means.

RAJA. I mean a little more than that—but no matter. I have sometimes thought of instituting a peerage, in order that I might raise Watkins to it. But I mustn't let my admiration for British institutions carry me too far.—Those scoundrels of bearers are taking a long time, Watkins.

WATKINS. The lady's litter 'ad to 'ave fresh curtains, Your 'Ighness. They won't be a minute, now.

RAJA. You were speaking of transport, Major—is your machine past repair, Dr. Traherne?

TRAHERNE. Utterly, I'm afraid.

RAJA. Let us look at it. [*Turns and finds that his body-guard are all clustered on the path, looking at it. He gives a sharp word of command. They scamper into a sort of loose order, up, right.*] Ah, yes—propeller smashed—planes crumpled up—

TRAHERNE. Under-carriage wrecked—

RAJA. I'm afraid we can't offer to repair the damage for you.

TRAHERNE. I'm afraid not, sir.

RAJA. A wonderful machine! Yes, Europe has something to boast of. I wonder what the Priest here thinks of it. [*He says a few words to the* PRIEST, *who salaams, and replies volubly at some length.*] He says it is the great roc—the giant bird, you know, of our Eastern stories. And he declares that he plainly saw his Goddess hovering over you as you descended, and guiding you towards her temple.

TRAHERNE. I wish she could have guided us towards the level ground I saw behind your castle. I could have made a safe landing there.

RAJA. No doubt—on my parade ground—almost the only level spot in my dominions.

LUCILLA. These, I suppose, are your bodyguard?

RAJA. My household troops, Madam.

LUCILLA. How picturesque they are!

RAJA. Oh, a relic of barbarism, I know. I can quite understand the contempt with which my friend the Major is at this moment regarding them.

CRESPIN: Irregular troops, Raja. Often first-class fighting men.

RAJA. And you think that, if irregularity is the virtue of irregular troops, these—what is the expression, Watkins?

WATKINS. Tyke the cyke, Your 'Ighness?

RAJA. That's it—take the cake—that is what you are thinking?

CRESPIN. Well, they would be hard to beat, sir.

RAJA. I repeat—a relic of barbarism. You see, I have strong conservative instincts—I cling to the fashions

of my fathers—and my people would be restive if I didn't. I maintain these fellows, as his Majesty the King-Emperor keeps up the Beefeaters in the Tower. But I also like to move with the times, as perhaps you will allow me to show you. [*He blows two short blasts on a silver whistle hanging round his neck. Instantly from behind every rock and shrub—from every bit of cover—there emerges a soldier, in spick-and-span European uniform* (*Russian in style*), *armed with the latest brand of magazine rifles. They stand like statues at attention.*]

CRESPIN. Good Lord!

TRAHERNE. Hallo!

RAJA. [*To* LUCILLA, *who makes no move.*] I trust I did not startle you, Madam?

LUCILLA. Oh, not at all. I'm not nervous.

RAJA. You of course realize that this effect is not original. I have plagiarized it from the excellent Walter Scott:

> "These are Clan-Alpine's warriors true,
> And, Saxon, I am Roderick Dhu!"

But I think you'll admit, Major, that my men know how to take cover.

CRESPIN. By the Lord, sir, they must move like cats—for you can't have planted them there before we arrived.

RAJA. No, you had given me no notice of your coming.

LUCILLA. Perhaps the Goddess did.

RAJA. Not she, Madam. She keeps her own counsel. These men followed me down from the palace and have taken up position while we have been speaking. [*The* RAJA *gives a word of command, and the men*

rapidly assemble and form in two ranks, an officer on their flank.]

CRESPIN. A very smart body of men, Raja. Allow me to congratulate you on their training.

RAJA. I am greatly flattered, Major. I superintend it myself.—Ah, here comes the litter. [*Down the path comes a litter borne, like the* RAJA'S, *by four men. It is followed by two mountain-chairs carried by two men apiece.*] Permit me, Madam, to hand you to your palanquin. [*He offers* LUCILLA *his hand. As she rises she picks up her leather coat, and the newspaper falls to the ground. The* RAJA *notices it.*] Forgive me, Madam. [*Picks up the paper and looks at it.*] A newspaper, only two days old! This is such a rarity you must allow me to glance at it. [*He opens the paper and sees that a strip has been torn out from the back page.*] Ah! the telegraphic news gone! What a pity! In my seclusion, I hunger for tidings from the civilized world. [*The* PRIEST *comes forward and speaks to him eagerly, suggesting in pantomime* TRAHERNE'S *action in burning the paper, and pointing to the ashes on the ground, at which the* RAJA *looks.*] You burned this column?

TRAHERNE. Unfortunately, I did.

RAJA. Ah! [*Pause.*] I know your motive, Dr. Traherne, and I appreciate it. You destroyed it out of consideration for my feelings, wishing to spare me a painful piece of intelligence. That was very thoughtful—but quite unnecessary. I already know what you tried to conceal.

CRESPIN. You know—!

TRAHERNE. Your Highness knows—!

[*Simultaneously.*]

RAJA. I know that three of my subjects, accused of a political crime, have been sentenced to death.

TRAHERNE. How is it possible—?

RAJA. Bad news flies fast, Dr. Traherne. But one thing you can perhaps tell me—is there any chance of their sentences being remitted?

TRAHERNE. I am afraid not, your Highness.

CRESPIN. Remitted? I should rather say not. It was a cold-blooded, unprovoked murder.

RAJA. Unprovoked, you think? Well, I won't argue the point. And the execution is to be—?

TRAHERNE. I think tomorrow—or the day after.

RAJA. Tomorrow or the day after—yes. [*Turning to* LUCILLA.] Forgive me, Madam—I have kept you waiting.

TRAHERNE. Does your Highness know anything of these men?

RAJA. [*Over his shoulder, as he hands* LUCILLA *into the litter.*] Know them? Oh, yes—they are my brothers. [*He seats himself on his own litter and claps his hands twice. Both litters are raised and move off,* LUCILLA'S *first. The regular soldiers line the way, in single rank. They salute as the litters pass.* WATKINS *follows the* RAJA'S. CRESPIN *and* TRAHERNE *seat themselves in their chairs. As they do so:*]

CRESPIN. His brothers? What did he mean?

TRAHERNE. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Heaven knows!

CRESPIN. I don't half like our host, Traherne. There's too much of the cat about him.

TRAHERNE. Or of the tiger. And how the devil had he got the news?

[*As the two chairs move off,* CRESPIN *first, the*

two ranks of soldiers close round them. The irregulars and musicians, headed by the dancing negro, bring up the rear. The PRIEST *prostrates himself, as if in thanksgiving, before the Goddess.*]

CURTAIN

ACT SECOND

A spacious and well-proportioned room, opening at the back upon a wide loggia. Beyond the loggia can be seen distant snow-peaks and a strip of sky. Late afternoon light.

The room is furnished in a once splendid but now very old-fashioned and faded style. Furniture of black picked out with gold, and upholstered in yellow damask. A great crystal chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, and under it a circular ottoman. Right, a large two-leaved door; left, a handsome marble fireplace, with a mirror over it. Candlesticks with crystal pendants at each end of the mantelpiece, and in the middle a bronze statuette, some eighteen inches high, representing the many-armed Goddess. A wood fire laid, but unlighted. Near the fireplace, two quite modern saddle-bag arm-chairs, out of keeping with the stiffness of the remaining furniture. A small table near the door, right, with modern English and French books on it. A handsome gramophone in the corner, right. On the walls, left and right, some very bad paintings of fine-looking Orientals in gorgeous attire. Electric lights.

TRAHERNE *discovered at back, centre, looking out over the landscape. He does not go out upon the loggia (which can be entered both right and left without passing through the room) because two turbanned servants are there, under the direction of an old*

and dignified Major-domo, arranging a luxurious dinner table, with four covers. TRAHERNE *stands motionless for a moment. Then enters* CRESPIN *by the door, right, ushered in by a servant, who salaams and retires.*

CRESPIN. Ah, there you are, Doctor.

TRAHERNE. [*Turning.*] Hullo! How did you get on?

CRESPIN. All right. Had a capital tub. And you?

TRAHERNE. Feeling more like a human being. And what about Mrs. Crespin? I hope she's all right.

CRESPIN. She was taken off by an ayah as soon as we got in—presumably to the women's quarters.

TRAHERNE. And you let her go off alone?

CRESPIN. What the hell could I do? I couldn't thrust myself into the women's quarters.

TRAHERNE. You could have kept her with you.

CRESPIN. Do you think she'd have stayed? And, come to that, what business is it of yours?

TRAHERNE. It's any man's business to be concerned for a woman's safety.

CRESPIN. Well, well—all right. But there was nothing I could have done or that she would let me do. And I don't think there's any danger.

TRAHERNE. Let us hope not.

CRESPIN. It's a vast shanty this.

TRAHERNE. It's a palace and a fortress in one.

CRESPIN. A devilish strong place before the days of big guns. But a couple of howitzers would soon make it look pretty foolish.

TRAHERNE. No doubt; but how would you get them here?

CRESPIN. [*Looking at the dinner table.*] I say—it looks as if our friend were going to do us well. [*One of the servants comes in with a wine-cooler. When the*

man has gone, CRESPIN *picks up the bottle and looks at the label.*] Perrier Jouet, nineteen-o-six, by the lord! [*He strolls over to the ottoman, and seats himself, facing the fire-place.*] It's a rum start this, Traherne. I suppose you intellectual chaps would call it romantic.

TRAHERNE. [*Examining the figure of the Goddess on the mantelpiece.*] More romantic than agreeable, I should say. I don't like the looks of this lady.

CRESPIN. What is she?

TRAHERNE. The same figure we saw in the little temple, where we landed.

CRESPIN. How many arms has she got?

TRAHERNE. Six.

CRESPIN. She could give you a jolly good hug, anyway.

TRAHERNE. You wouldn't want another.

CRESPIN. Where do you suppose we really are, Traherne?

TRAHERNE. On the map, you mean?

CRESPIN. Of course.

TRAHERNE. Oh, in the never-never land. Somewhere on the way to Bokhara. I've been searching my memory for all I ever heard about Rukh. I fancy very little is known, except that it seems to send forth a peculiarly poisonous breed of fanatics.

CRESPIN. Like those who did poor Haredale in?

TRAHERNE. Precisely.

CRESPIN. D'you think our host was serious when he said they were his brothers? Or was he only pulling our leg, curse his impudence?

TRAHERNE. He probably meant caste-brothers, or simply men of the same race. But, even so, it's awkward.

CRESPIN. I don't see what these beggars, living at the back of the north wind, have got to do with Indian politics. We've never interfered with them.

TRAHERNE. Oh, it's a case of Asia for the Asians. Ever since the Japanese beat the Russians, the whole continent has been itching to kick us out.

CRESPIN. So that they may cut each other's throats at leisure, eh?

TRAHERNE. We Westerners never cut each other's throats, d o we?

[WATKINS *has entered at the back, right, carrying a silver centre-piece for the table. He sets it down and is going out to the left, when* CRESPIN *catches sight of him and hails him.*]

CRESPIN. Hallo! You there! What's your name! [WATKINS *stops.*] Just come here a minute, will you?

WATKINS. Meaning me, sir? [*He advances into the room. There is a touch of covert insolence in his manner.*]

CRESPIN. Yes, you, Mr.——? Mr.——?

WATKINS. Watkins is my name, sir.

CRESPIN. Right ho! Watkins. Can you tell us where we are, Watkins?

WATKINS. They calls the place Rukh, sir.

CRESPIN. Yes, yes, we know that. But where i s Rukh?

WATKINS. I hunderstand these mountains is called the 'Imalayas, sir.

CRESPIN. Damn it, sir, we don't want a lesson in geography!

WATKINS. No, sir? My mistake, sir.

TRAHERNE. Major Crespin means that we want to know how far we are from the nearest point in India.

WATKINS. I really couldn't say, sir. Not so very far, I dessay, as the crow flies.

TRAHERNE. Unfortunately we're not in a position to fly with the crow. How long does the journey take?

WATKINS. They tell me it takes about three weeks to Cashmere.

CRESPIN. They tell you! Surely you must remember how long it took y o u ?

WATKINS. No, sir, excuse me, sir—I've never been in India.

CRESPIN. Not been in India? And I was just thinking, as I looked at you, that I seemed to have seen you before.

WATKINS. Not in India, sir. We might 'ave met in England, but I don't call to mind having that pleasure.

CRESPIN. But if you haven't been in India, how the hell did you get here?

WATKINS. I came with 'Is 'Ighness, sir, by way of Tashkent. All our dealin's with Europe is by way of Russia.

TRAHERNE. But it's possible to get to India direct, and not by way of Central Asia?

WATKINS. Oh, yes, it's done, sir. But I'm told there are some very tight places to negotiate—like the camel and the needle's eye, as you might say.

TRAHERNE. Difficult travelling for a lady, eh?

WATKINS. Next door to himpossible, I should guess, sir.

CRESPIN. A nice look-out, Traherne! [*To* WATKINS.] Tell me, my man—is His Highness—h'm—married?

WATKINS. Oh, yessir—very much so, sir.

CRESPIN. Children?

WATKINS. He has fifteen sons, sir.

CRESPIN. The daughters don't count, eh?

WATKINS. I've never 'ad a hopportunity of counting 'em, sir.

TRAHERNE. He said the men accused of assassinating a political officer were his brothers—

WATKINS. [*Quickly.*] Did 'e say that, sir?

TRAHERNE. Didn't you hear him? What did he mean?

WATKINS. I'm sure I couldn't say, sir. 'Is 'Ighness is what you'd call a very playful gentleman, sir.

TRAHERNE. But I don't see the joke in saying that.

WATKINS. No, sir? P'raps 'Is 'Ighness'll explain, sir. [*A pause.*]

CRESPIN. Your master spoke of visits from European ladies—do t h e y come from Russia?

WATKINS. From various parts, I understand, sir,—mostly from Paris.

CRESPIN. Any here now?

WATKINS. I really couldn't say, sir.

TRAHERNE. They don't dine with His Highness?

WATKINS. Oh, no, sir. 'Is 'Ighness sometimes sups with t h e m.

CRESPIN. And my wife—Mrs. Crespin—?

WATKINS. Make your mind easy, sir—the lady won't meet any hundesirable characters, sir. I give strict orders to the—the female what took charge of the lady.

TRAHERNE. She is to be trusted?

WATKINS. Habsolutely, sir. She is—in a manner of speakin',—my wife, sir.

CRESPIN. Mrs. Watkins, eh?

WATKINS. Yessir—I suppose you would say so.

TRAHERNE. But now look here, Watkins—you say we're three weeks away from Cashmere—yet the Raja knew of the sentence passed on these subjects of

his, who were tried only three days ago. How do you account for that?

WATKINS. I can't, sir. All I can say is, there's queer things goes on here.

TRAHERNE. Queer things? What do you mean?

WATKINS. Well, sir, them priests you know—they goes in a lot for what 'Is 'Ighness calls magic—

TRAHERNE. Oh, come, Watkins—you don't believe in that!

WATKINS. Well, sir, p'raps not. I don't, not to say b e - l i e v e in it. But there's queer things goes on. I can't say no more, nor I can't say no less. If you'll excuse me, sir, I must just run my eye over the dinner-table. 'Is 'Ighness will be here directly.

[*He retires, inspects the table, makes one or two changes, and presently goes out by the back, left.*]

CRESPIN. That fellow's either a cunning rascal or a damned fool. Which do you think?

TRAHERNE. I don't believe he's the fool he'd like us to take him for.—Ah, here is Mrs. Crespin.

[*Enter* LUCILLA, *right, ushered in by a handsome* AYAH. *She is dressed in a gauzy gown of quite recent style, dark blue or crimson. Not in the least décolleté. At most the sleeves might be open, so as to show her arms to the elbow. No ornaments except a gold locket on a little gold chain round her neck. The costume is absolutely plain, but in striking contrast to her travelling dress. Her hair is beautifully arranged.*]

LUCILLA. [*To the* AYAH.] Thank you. [*The* AYAH *disappears.* LUCILLA *advances, holding out her skirt a little.*] Behold the Paris model!

CRESPIN. My eye, Lu, what a ripping frock!

TRAHERNE. Talk of magic, Major! There's something in what our friend says.

LUCILLA. What is that? What about magic?

CRESPIN. We'll tell you afterwards. Let's have your adventures first.

LUCILLA. No adventures precisely—only a little excursion into the Arabian Nights.

TRAHERNE. Do tell us!

LUCILLA. [*Evidently a little nervous, yet not without enjoyment of the experience.*] Well, my guide—the woman you saw—led me along corridor after corridor, and upstairs and downstairs, till we came to a heavy bronze door where two villainous-looking blacks, with crooked swords, were on guard. I didn't like the looks of them a bit; but I was in for it and had to go on. They drew their swords and flourished a sort of salute, grinning with all their teeth. Then the ayah clapped her hands twice, some one inspected us through a grating in the door, and the ayah said a word or two—

TRAHERNE. No doubt "Open sesame!"

LUCILLA. The door was opened by a hideous, hump-backed old woman, just like the wicked fairy in a pantomime. She didn't actually bite me, but she looked as if she'd like to—and we passed on. More corridors, with curtained doorways, where I had a feeling that furtive eyes were watching me—though I can't positively say I saw them. But I'm sure I heard whisperings and titterings—

CRESPIN. Good Lord! If I'd thought they were going to treat you like that, I'd have—

LUCILLA. Oh, there was nothing you could have done; and, you see, no harm came of it. At last the woman led me into a large sort of wardrobe room, lighted

from above, and almost entirely lined with glazed presses full of frocks. Then she slid back a panel, and there was a marble-lined bath-room!—a deep pool, with a trickle of water flowing into it from a dolphin's head of gold—just enough to make the surface ripple and dance. And all around were the latest Bond Street luxuries—shampooing bowls and brushes, bottles of essences, towels on hot rails and all the rest of it. The only thing that was disagreeable was a sickly odour from some burning pastilles—oh, and a coal-black bath-woman.

TRAHERNE. It suggests a Royal Academy picture—"The Odalisque's Pool."

CRESPIN. Or a soap advertisement.

TRAHERNE. Same thing.

LUCILLA. Well, I wasn't sorry to play the odalisque for once; and when I had finished, lo and behold! the ayah had laid out for me half a dozen gorgeous and distinctly risky dinner-gowns. I had to explain to her in gestures that I couldn't live up to any of them, and would rather put on my old travelling dress. She seemed quite frightened at the idea—

CRESPIN. Ha ha! She'd probably have got the sack—perhaps literally—if she'd let you do that.

LUCILLA. Anyway, she at last produced this comparatively inoffensive frock. She did my hair, and wanted to finish me off with all sorts of necklaces and bangles, but I stuck to my old locket with the babies' heads.

CRESPIN. Well, all's well that ends well, I suppose. But if I'd foreseen all this "Secrets of the Zenana" business, I'm dashed if I wouldn't—

LUCILLA [*Cutting him short.*] What were you saying about magic when I came in?

TRAHERNE. Only that this man, Watkins—he's the husband of your ayah, by the way—says queer things go on here, and pretends to believe in magic.

LUCILLA. Do you know, Antony, when the Raja was speaking about him down there, it seemed to me that his face was somehow familiar to me.

CRESPIN. There, Doctor! What did I say? I knew I'd seen him before, but I'm damned if I can place him.

LUCILLA. I wish I could get a good look at him.

[WATKINS *enters, back, left, with something for the table.*]

TRAHERNE. There he is. Shall I call him in?

LUCILLA. Say I want him to thank his wife from me.

TRAHERNE. [*Calls.*] Watkins.

WATKINS. Sir?

TRAHERNE. Mrs. Crespin would like to speak to you.

[WATKINS *comes forward.*]

LUCILLA. I hear, Watkins, that the ayah who so kindly attended to me is your wife.

WATKINS. That's right, ma'am.

LUCILLA. She gave me most efficient assistance, and, as she seems to know no English, I couldn't thank her. Will you be good enough to tell her how much I appreciated all she did for me?

WATKINS. Thank you kindly, ma'am. She'll be proud to hear it. [*Pause.*] Is that all, ma'am?

LUCILLA. That's all, thank you, Watkins.

[*He returns to the loggia, but goes to the other side of the dinner-table and keeps an eye on the three.*]

CRESPIN. You've a good memory for faces, Lu. Do you spot him?

LUCILLA. Don't let him see we're talking about him.

I believe I do know him, but I'm not quite sure. Do you remember, the first year we were in India, there was a man of the Dorsets that used often to be on guard outside the mess-room?

CRESPIN. By God, you've hit it!

TRAHERNE. Take care! He's watching.

LUCILLA. You remember he deserted, and was suspected of having murdered a woman in the bazaar.

CRESPIN. I believe it's the very man.

LUCILLA. It's certainly very like him.

CRESPIN. And he swears he's never been in India!

TRAHERNE. Under the circumstances, he naturally would.

LUCILLA. At all events, he's not a man to be trusted.

[*At this momen the* RAJA *enters by the door, right. He is in faultless European evening dress —white waistcoat, white tie, etc. No jewels, except the ribbon and star of a Russian order. Nothing oriental about him except his turban and his complexion.*]

RAJA. [*As he enters.*] Pray forgive me, Madam, for being the last to appear. The fact is, I had to hold a sort of Cabinet Council—or shall I say a conclave of prelates?—with regard to questions arising out of your most welcome arrival.

CRESPIN. May we hope, Raja, that you were laying a dawk for our return.

RAJA. Pray, pray, Major, let us postpone that question for the moment. First let us fortify ourselves; after dinner we will talk seriously. If you are in t o o great a hurry to desert me, must I not conclude, Madam, that you are dissatisfied with your reception?

LUCILLA. How could we possibly be so ungrateful, your Highness? Your hospitality overwhelms us.

RAJA. I trust my Mistress of the Robes furnished you with all you required?

LUCILLA. With all and more than all. She offered me quite a bewildering array of gorgeous apparel.

RAJA. Oh, I am glad. I had hoped that perhaps your choice might have fallen on something more—[*He indicates by gestures, "décolleté"*]. But no—I was wrong—Madam's taste is irreproachable.

[*A servant enters from behind with cocktails on a silver salver.* LUCILLA *refuses. The men accept.* LUCILLA *picks up a yellow French book on one of the tables.*]

RAJA. You see, Madam, we fall behind the age here. We are still in the Anatole France period. If he bores you, here [*picking up another book*] is a Maurice Barrès that you may find more amusing.

LUCILLA. Oh, I too am in the Anatole France period, I assure you. [*Reads.*] "Sur la Pierre Blanche"—isn't that the one you were recommending to me, Dr. Traherne?

TRAHERNE. Yes, I like it better than some of his later books.

RAJA. [*Picking up a silver-grey book.*] As for Bernard Shaw, I suppose he's quite a back number; but I confess his impudence entertains me. What do y o u say, Major?

CRESPIN. Never read a line of the fellow—except in *John Bull.*

LUCILLA and TRAHERNE. [*Simultaneously.*] In *John Bull!*

CRESPIN. Somebody told me he wrote in *John Bull*—doesn't he?

RAJA. Are you fond of music, Mrs. Crespin? [*Goes to the gramophone, and turns over some records, till*

he finds one which he lays on the top of the pile.] Suppose we have some during dinner. [WATKINS *enters from the back, left.*] Watkins, just start this top record, will you? [WATKINS *does so.*]

[*At this moment the* MAJOR-DOMO *enters from the back, and says a few words.*]

RAJA. Ah! *Madame est servie!* Allow me—

[*He offers* LUCILLA *his arm and leads her to the table. The others follow.*] Will you take this seat, Madam? You here, Major—Dr. Traherne! [*He himself sits to the left of the table;* LUCILLA *on his right;* TRAHERNE *opposite him; and* CRESPIN *opposite* LUCILLA, *with his back to the sunset, which is now flooding the scene.*]

RAJA. [*As the servants offer dishes.*] I can recommend this caviare, Major—and you'll take a glass of maraschino with it—Russian fashion.

[*Just as they sit down the gramophone reels out the first bars of a piece of music.*]

LUCILLA. [*After listening a moment.*] Oh, what is that?

RAJA. Don't you know it?

LUCILLA. Oh, yes, but I can't think what it is.

RAJA. Gounod's "Funeral March of a Marionette"—a most humorous composition. May I pour you a glass of maraschino? [*He goes on talking as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

When it rises again, the glow has faded, and some big stars are pulsing in the strip of purple sky. The party is just finishing dinner. Dessert is on the table, which is lighted by electric lamps. WATKINS *stands*

behind the RAJA's *chair.* The MAJOR-DOMO *and other servants hover round.*

The RAJA *has just finished a story, at which all laugh. A short pause.*]

LUCILLA. What a heavenly night!

RAJA. Yes, our summer climate is far from bad.

LUCILLA. The air is like champagne.

RAJA. A little over frappé for some tastes. What do you say, Madam? Shall we have coffee indoors? There is an edge to the air at these altitudes, as soon as the sun has gone down.

LUCILLA. [*Shivers slightly.*] Yes, I do feel a little chilly.

RAJA. Watkins, send for a shawl for Madam. [*Rising.*] And ah—let us have the fire lighted. [WATKINS *goes off to the left. The* RAJA *says a word to the* MAJOR-DOMO, *who touches a switch in one of the pillars of the loggia opening. The chandelier and wall-lamps of the salon burst into brilliant light.*]

RAJA. [*Offering his arm to* LUCILLA.] Let me find you a comfortable seat, Madam. [*He leads her to the further back of the two arm-chairs.*] When the fire is lighted, I think you will find this quite pleasant. Take the other chair, Major. [CRESPIN *does so.*] I must really refurnish this salon. My ancestors had no notion of comfort. To tell the truth, I use the room only on state occasions, like the present. [*Bowing to* LUCILLA.] I have a much more modern snuggery upstairs, which I hope you will see to-morrow.

[*Servants hand round coffee, liqueurs, cigars, cigarettes during what follows. One of them lights the fire, of aromatic wood.*]

RAJA. [*To* TRAHERNE, *who has remained at the loggia*

opening, looking out into the night.] Star-gazing, Dr. Traherne?

TRAHERNE. I beg your pardon. [*Comes forward.*]

LUCILLA. Dr. Traherne is quite an astronomer.

RAJA. As much at home with the telescope as with the miscroscope, eh?

TRAHERNE. Oh, no. I'm no astronomer. I can pick out a few of the constellations,—that's all.

RAJA. For my part, I look at the stars as little as possible. As a spectacle they're monotonous, and they don't bear thinking of.

[*The* AYAH, *entering by door, right, brings* LUCILLA *a shawl, which the* RAJA *places on her shoulders.*]

LUCILLA. What an exquisite shawl!

RAJA. And most becoming—don't you think so, Doctor? [TRAHERNE *is gazing at* LUCILLA.] My Mistress of the Robes has chosen well! [*He makes a motion of noiseless applause to the* AYAH, *who grins and exit, right.*]

LUCILLA. Why won't the stars bear thinking of, Raja?

RAJA. Well, dear lady, don't you think they're rather ostentatious? *I* was guilty of a little showing-off today, when I played that foolish trick with my regular troops. But think of the Maharaja up yonder [*pointing upwards*] who night after night whistles up his glittering legions, and puts them through their deadly punctual drill, as much as to say "See what a devil of a fellow *I* am!" Do you think it quite in good taste, Madam?

TRAHERNE. [*Laughing.*] I'm afraid you're jealous, Raja. You don't like having to play second fiddle to a still more absolute ruler.

RAJA. Perhaps you're right, Doctor—perhaps it's

partly that. But there's something more to it. I can't help resenting—[*To* CRESPIN *to whom a servant is offering liqueurs.*] Let me recommend the kummel, Major. I think you'll find it excellent.

TRAHERNE. What is it you resent?

RAJA. Oh, the respect paid to mere size—to the immensity, as they call it, of the universe. Are we to worship a god because he's big?

TRAHERNE. If you resent his bigness, what do you say to his littleness? The microscope, you know, reveals him no less than the telescope.

RAJA. And reveals him in the form of death-dealing specks of matter, which you, I understand, Doctor, are impiously proposing to exterminate.

TRAHERNE. I am trying to marshal the life-saving against the death-dealing powers.

RAJA. To marshal God's right hand against his left, eh? or *vice versa?* But I admit you have the pull of the astronomers, in so far as you deal in life, not in dead mechanism. [*Killing a gnat on the back of his hand.*] This mosquito that I have just killed —I am glad to see you smoke, Madam: it helps to keep them off—this mosquito, or any smallest thing that has life in it, is to me far more admirable than a whole lifeless universe. What do y o u say, Major?

CRESPIN. [*Smoking a cigar.*] I say, Raja, that if you'll tell that fellow to give me another glass of kümmel, I'll let you have your own way about the universe. [*The* RAJA *says a word to one of the servants, who refills* CRESPIN'S *glass.*]

LUCILLA. But what if the mechanism, as you call it, isn't dead? What if the stars are swarming with life?

TRAHERNE. Yes—suppose there are planets, which of course we can't see, circling round each of the great

suns we d o see? And suppose they are all inhabited?

RAJA. I'd rather not suppose it. Isn't one inhabited world bad enough? Do we want it multiplied by millions?

LUCILLA. Haven't you just been telling us that a living gnat is more wonderful than a dead universe?

RAJA. Wonderful? Yes, by all means—wonderful as a device for torturing and being tortured. Oh, I'm neither a saint nor an ascetic—I take life as I find it —I am tortured and I torture. But there's one thing I'm really proud of—I'm proud to belong to the race of the Buddha, who first found out that life was a colossal blunder.

LUCILLA [*In a low voice.*] Should you like the sky to be starless? That seems to me—forgive me, Prince—the last word of impiety.

RAJA. Possibly, Madam. How my esteemed fellow-creatures were ever bluffed into piety is a mystery to me. Not that I'm complaining. If men could not be bluffed by the Raja above, much less would they be bluffed by us Rajas below. And though life is a contemptible business, I don't deny that p o w e r is the best part of it.

TRAHERNE. In short, your Highness is a Superman.

RAJA. Ah, you read Nietzsche? Yes, if I weren't of the kindred of the Buddha, I should like to be of the race of that great man.

[*The servants have now all withdrawn.*]

LUCILLA. [*Looking out.*] There is the moon rising over the snowfields. I hope you wouldn't banish h e r from the heavens?

RAJA. Oh, no—I like her silly, good-natured face. And she's useful to lovers and brigands and other lawless vagabonds, with whom I have great sympathy.

Besides, I don't know that she's so silly either. She seems to be for ever raising her eyebrows in mild astonishment at human folly.

CRESPIN. All this is out of my depth, your Highness. We've had a rather fatiguing day. Mightn't we—?

RAJA. To be sure. I only waited till the servants had gone. Now, are you all quite comfortable?

LUCILLA. Quite.

TRAHERNE. Perfectly, thank you.

CRESPIN. Perfectly.

RAJA. [*Smoking a cigar, and standing with his back to the fire.*] Then we'll go into committee upon your position here.

CRESPIN. If you please, sir.

RAJA. I'm afraid you may find it rather disagreeable.

CRESPIN. Communications bad, eh? We have a difficult journey before us?

RAJA. A long journey, I fear—yet not precisely difficult.

CRESPIN. It surely can't be so very far, since you had heard of the sentence passed on those assassins.

RAJA. I am glad, Major, that you have so tactfully spared me the pain of re-opening that subject. We should have had to come to it, sooner or later. [*An embarrassed pause.*]

TRAHERNE. When your Highness said they were your brothers, you were of course speaking figuratively. You meant your tribesmen?

RAJA. Not at all. They are sons of my father—not of my mother.

LUCILLA. And we intrude upon you at such a time! How dreadful!

RAJA. Oh, pray don't apologize. Believe me, your arrival has given great satisfaction.

TRAHERNE. How do you mean?

RAJA. I'll explain presently. But first—

CRESPIN. [*Interrupting.*] First let us understand each other. You surely can't approve of this abominable crime?

RAJA. My brothers are fanatics, and there is no fanaticism in me.

LUCILLA. How do they come to be so different from you?

RAJA. That is just what I was going to tell you. I was my father's eldest son, by his favourite wife. Through my mother's influence (my poor mother—how I loved her!) I was sent to Europe. My education was wholly European. I shed all my prejudices. I became the open-minded citizen of the world whom I hope you recognize in me. My brothers, on the other hand, turned to India for their culture. The religion of our people has always been a primitive idolatry. My brothers naturally fell in with adherents of the same superstition, and they worked each other up to a high pitch of frenzy against the European exploitation of Asia.

TRAHERNE. Had you no restraining influence upon them?

RAJA. Of course I might have imprisoned them—or had them strangled—the traditional form of argument in our family. But why should I? As I said, I have no prejudices—least of all in favour of the British raj. We are of Indian race, though long severed from the Motherland—and I do not love her tyrants.

CRESPIN. [*Who has had quite enough to drink.*] In short, sir, you defend this devilish murder?

RAJA. Oh, no—I think it foolish and futile. But there is

a romantic as well as a practical side to my nature, and, from the romantic point of view, I rather admire it.

CRESPIN. [*Rising.*] Then, sir, the less we intrude on your hospitality the better. If you will be good enough to furnish us with transport tomorrow morning—

RAJA. That is just where the difficulty arises—

CRESPIN. No transport, hey?

RAJA. Materially it might be managed; but morally I fear it is—excuse the colloquialism, Madam—no go.

CRESPIN. What the devil do you mean, sir—?

LUCILLA. [*Trying to cover his bluster.*] Will your Highness be good enough to explain?

RAJA. I mentioned that the religion of my people is a primitive superstition? Well, since the news has spread that three Feringhis have dropped from the skies precisely at the time when three princes of the royal house are threatened with death at the hands of the Feringhi government,—and dropped, moreover, in the precincts of a temple—my subjects have got into their heads that you have been personally conducted hither by the Goddess whom they especially worship.

LUCILLA. The Goddess—?

RAJA. [*Turning to the statuette.*] Here is her portrait on the mantelpiece—much admired by connoisseurs.

[LUCILLA *cannot repress a shudder.*]

RAJA. I need not say that I am far from sharing the popular illusion. Your arrival is of course the merest coincidence—for me, a charming coincidence. But my people hold unphilosophic views. I understand that even in England the vulgar are apt to see the Finger

of Providence in particularly fortunate—or unfortunate—occurrences.

CRESPIN. Then the upshot of all this palaver is that you propose to hold us as hostages, to exchange for your brothers?

RAJA. That is not precisely the idea, my dear sir. My theologians do not hold that an exchange is what the Goddess decrees. Nor, to be quite frank, would it altogether suit my book.

LUCILLA. Not to get your brothers back again?

RAJA. You may have noted in history, Madam, that family affection is seldom the strong point of Princes. Is it not Pope who remarks on their lack of enthusiasm for "a brother near the throne"? My sons are mere children, and were I to die—we are all mortal—there might be trouble about the succession. In our family, uncles seldom love nephews.

LUCILLA. So you would raise no finger to save your brothers?

RAJA. That is not my only reason. Supposing it possible that I could bully the Government of India into giving up my relatives, do you think it would sit calmly down under the humiliation? No, no, dear lady. It might wait a few years to find some decent pretext, but assuredly we should have a punitive expedition. It would cost thousands of lives and millions of money, but what would that matter? Prestige would be restored, and I should end my days in a maisonette in Petrograd. It wouldn't suit me at all. Hitherto I have escaped the notice of your Government by a policy of masterly inactivity, and I propose to adhere to that policy.

CRESPIN. Then I don't see how—

TRAHERNE. [*Simultaneously.*] Surely you don't mean—?

RAJA. We are approaching the crux of the matter—a point which I fear you may have some difficulty in appreciating. I would beg you to remember, that, though I am what is commonly called an autocrat, there is no such thing under the sun as real despotism. All government is government by consent of the people. It is very stupid of them to consent—but they do. I have studied the question—I took a pretty good degree at Cambridge, in Moral and Political Science—and I assure you that, though I have absolute power of life and death over my subjects, it is only their acquiescence that gives me that power. If I defied their prejudices or their passions, they could upset my throne tomorrow.

CRESPIN. [*Angrily.*] Will you be so kind as to come to the point, sir?

RAJA. Gently, Major! We shall reach it soon enough. [*To* LUCILLA.] Please remember, too, Madam, that an autocracy is generally a theocracy to boot, and mine is a case in point. I am a slave to theology. The clerical party can do what it pleases with me, for there is no other party to oppose it. True, I am my own Archbishop of Canterbury—but "I have a partner: Mr. Jorkins"—I have a terribly exacting Archbishop of York. I fear I may have to introduce you to him tomorrow.

LUCILLA. You are torturing us, your Highness. Like my husband, I beg you to come to the point.

RAJA. The point is, dear lady, that the theology on which, as I say, my whole power is founded, has not yet emerged from the Mosaic stage of development: it demands an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—

[*A long pause.*]

a life for a life.

[*Another pause.*]

TRAHERNE. You mean to say—

RAJA. Unfortunately, I do.

LUCILLA. You would kill us—?

RAJA. Not I, Madam—the clerical party. And only if my brothers are executed. If not, I will merely demand your word of honour that what has passed between us shall never be mentioned to any human soul—and you shall go free.

CRESPIN. But if your brother assassins are hanged—as assuredly they will be—you will put to death in cold blood—

RAJA. [*Interrupting.*] Oh, not in cold blood, Major. There is nothing cold-blooded about the clerical party when "white goats," as their phrase goes, are to be sacrificed to the Goddess.

TRAHERNE. Does your Goddess demand the life of a woman?

RAJA. Well, on that point she might not be too exacting. "On trouve avec le Ciel des accommodements." If Madam would be so gracious as to favour me with her—society—

[LUCILLA *after gazing at him for a moment speechless, realizes his meaning and springs up with a cry of rage and shame.*]

TRAHERNE. Scoundrel!

CRESPIN. [*Draws his revolver.*] Another word, and I shoot you like a dog!

RAJA. Oh, no, Major—that wouldn't help a bit. You would only be torn to pieces instead of beheaded. Besides, I have had your teeth drawn. That precaution was taken while you were at your bath.

CRESPIN. [*Examines his revolver and finds it empty.*] Damnation!

LUCILLA [*Raising her head and addressing both men.*] Promise you won't leave me alone! If we must die, let me die first.

RAJA. The order of the ceremony, Madam, will not be at these gentlemen's choice. [LUCILLA *makes a gesture of despair.*] But do not be alarmed. No constraint shall be put upon your inclinations. Dr. Traherne reproached me with lack of consideration for your sex, and I hinted that, if you so pleased, your sex should meet with every consideration. I gather that you do n o t so please? Well, I scarcely hoped you would—I do not press the point. None the less, the suggestion remains open. And now, I'm afraid I've been talking a great deal. You must be fatigued.

[*The* MAJOR-DOMO *appears at the door, right, with a slip of paper on a salver. The* RAJA *motions him to advance, goes to meet him, takes the paper and looks at it.*]

RAJA. Ah, this is interesting! If you will wait a few minutes, I may have some news for you. Excuse me.

[*Exit, right, followed by the* MAJOR-DOMO.]

[*The three stare at each other for a moment in speechless horror.*]

LUCILLA. And we were saved this morning—only for this!

TRAHERNE. Courage! There must be some way out.

CRESPIN. The whole thing's a damned piece of bluff! Ha, ha, ha! The scoundrel almost took me in.

LUCILLA. [*Throwing herself down on the ottoman in a passion of tears.*] My babies! Oh, my babies! Never to see them again! To leave them all alone in the world! My Ronny! My little Iris! What can we

do? What can we do? Antony! Dr. Traherne! Think of something—something—

CRESPIN. Yes, yes, Lu—we'll think of something—

TRAHERNE. There's that fellow Watkins—we might bribe him—

LUCILLA. Oh, offer him every penny we have in the world—

TRAHERNE. I'm afraid he's a malicious scoundrel. He must have known what was hanging over our heads, and, looking back, I seem to see him gloating over it.

LUCILLA. Still—still—perhaps he can be bought. Antony! Think of the children! Oh, do let us try.

CRESPIN. But even if he would, he couldn't guide us through the mountains.

LUCILLA. Oh, he could hire some one else.

TRAHERNE. I don't believe we can possibly be so far from the frontier as he makes out.

LUCILLA. How far did he say?

TRAHERNE. Three weeks' journey. Yet they know all about things that happened less than a week ago.

[*Suddenly all the lights in the room go down very perceptibly. All look round in surprise.*]

LUCILLA. What is that? [*A sort of hissing and chittering sound is heard faintly but unmistakably.*] What an odd sound!

TRAHERNE. Major! Do you hear that!

CRESPIN. Do I hear it? I should say so!

TRAHERNE. Wireless!

CRESPIN. [*Much excited.*] Wireless, by Jupiter! They're sending out a message!

TRAHERNE. That accounts for it! They're in wireless communication with India!

LUCILLA. [*To* TRAHERNE.] Antony knows all about wireless.

CRESPIN. I should rather think so! Wasn't it my job all through the war! If I could hear more distinctly now—and if they're transmitting in clear—I could read their message.

TRAHERNE. That may be our salvation!

CRESPIN. If we could get control of the wireless for five minutes, and call up the aerodrome at Amil-Serai—

LUCILLA. What then?

CRESPIN. Why, we'd soon bring the Raja to his senses.

LUCILLA. [*To* CRESPIN.] Where do you suppose the installation is?

CRESPIN. Somewhere overhead I should say.

TRAHERNE. We must go very cautiously, Major. We must on no account let the Raja suspect that we know anything about wireless telegraphy, else he'd take care we should never get near the installation.

CRESPIN. Right you are, Traherne—I'll lie very low.

LUCILLA. [*Tearing off the shawl.*] And how are we to behave to that horrible man?

CRESPIN. We must keep a stiff upper lip, and play the game.

LUCILLA. You mean pretend to take part in his ghastly comedy of hospitality and politeness?

TRAHERNE. If you can, it would be wisest. His delight in showing off his European polish is all in our favour. But for that he might separate us and lock us up. We must avoid that at all costs.

LUCILLA. Oh, yes, yes—

CRESPIN. You've always had plenty of pluck, Lu—. Now's the time to show it.

LUCILLA. [*Putting on the shawl again.*] You can trust me. The thought of the children knocked me over

at first; but I'm not afraid to die. [*The chittering sound ceases, and the lights suddenly go up again.*] The noise has stopped.

CRESPIN. Yes, they've left off transmitting, and ceased to draw on the electric current.

TRAHERNE. He'll be back presently. Don't let us seem to be consulting.

[TRAHERNE *seats himself in an easy chair.* LUCILLA *sits on the ottoman.* CRESPIN *lights a cigar and takes the* RAJA'S *place before the fire.*]

CRESPIN. Curse it! I can't remember the wave-length and the call for Amil-Serai. I was constantly using it at one time.

TRAHERNE. It'll come back to you.

CRESPIN. I pray to the Lord it may!

[*The* RAJA *enters, right.*]

RAJA. I promised you news, and it has come.

CRESPIN. What news?

RAJA. My brothers' execution is fixed for the day after tomorrow.

LUCILLA. Then the day after tomorrow—?

RAJA. Yes—at sunset. [*A pause.*] But meanwhile I hope you will regard my poor house as your own. This is Liberty Hall. My tennis courts, my billiard-room, my library are all at your disposal. I should not advise you to pass the palace gates—it would not be safe, for popular feeling, I must warn you, runs very high. Besides, where could you go? There are three hundred miles of almost impassable country between you and the nearest British post.

TRAHERNE. In that case, Prince, how do you communicate with India? How has this news reached you?

RAJA. Does that puzzle you?

TRAHERNE. Naturally.

RAJA. You don't guess?

TRAHERNE. We have been trying to. The only thing we could think of was that you must be in wireless communication.

RAJA. You observed nothing to confirm the idea?

TRAHERNE. Why no.

RAJA. Did you not notice that the lights suddenly went down?

TRAHERNE. Yes, and at the same time we heard a peculiar hissing sound.

RAJA. None of you knew what it meant?

TRAHERNE. No.

RAJA. Then you have no knowledge of wireless telegraphy?

TRAHERNE. None.

RAJA. I may tell you, then, that that hissing i s the sound of wireless transmission. I a m in communication with India.

TRAHERNE. [*To the others.*] You see, I was right.

CRESPIN. You have a wireless expert here then?

RAJA. Watkins,—that invaluable fellow—he is my operator.

TRAHERNE. And with whom do you communicate?

RAJA. Do you think that quite a fair question, Doctor? Does it show your usual tact? I have my agents—I can say no more. [*Pause.*] Shall I ring for the ayah, Madam, to see you to your room?

LUCILLA. If you please. [*As he has his finger on the bell, she says*] No; stay a moment. [*Rises and advances towards him.*] Prince, I have two children. If it weren't for them, don't imagine that any of us

would beg a favour at your hands. But for their sakes won't you instruct your agent to communicate with Simla and try to bring about an exchange—your brothers' lives for ours?

RAJA. I am sorry, Madam, but I have already told you why that is impossible. Even if your Government agreed, it would assuredly take revenge on me for having extorted such a concession. No whisper of your presence here must ever reach India, or—again forgive the vulgarism—my goose is cooked.

LUCILLA. The thought of my children does not move you?

RAJA. My brothers have children—does the thought of them move the Government of India? No, Madam, I am desolated to have to refuse you, but you must not ask for the impossible. [*He presses the bell.*]

LUCILLA. Does it not strike you that, if you drive us to desperation, we may find means of cheating your Goddess? What is to prevent me, for instance, from throwing myself from that loggia?

RAJA. Nothing, dear lady, except that clinging to the known, and shrinking from the unknown, that all of us feel, even while we despise it. Besides, it would be foolishly precipitate, in every sense of the word. While there is life there is hope. You can't read my mind. For aught you can tell, I may have no intention of proceeding to extremities, and may only be playing a little joke upon you. I hope you have observed that I have a sense of humour. [*The* AYAH *enters.*] Ah, here is the ayah. Good night, Madam; sleep well. [*Bows her to the door. Exit* LUCILLA *with* AYAH.] Gentlemen, a whiskey and soda. No? Then

good night, good night. [*Exeunt* CRESPIN *and* TRAHERNE.]

[*The* RAJA *takes from the table a powerful electric torch, and switches it on. Then he switches off the lights of the room, which is totally dark except for the now moonlit background. He goes up to the idol on the mantelpiece, throws the light of the torch upon it, and makes it an ironic salaam. Then he lights himself towards the door, left, as*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT THIRD

The RAJA'S *Snuggery. An entirely European and modern room; its comfort contrasting with the old-fashioned, comfortless splendour of the scene of Act II.*

A door in front, left, opens on the billiard-room; another, a little further back, leads to the rest of the palace. A large and solid folding door in the back wall, centre. To the right, a large open window with a shallow balcony, which has the effect of being at a great height, and commands a view across the valley to the snow-peaks beyond.

On the right, near the window, a handsome pedestal writing table, with a large and heavy swivel chair behind it. Silver fittings on the table, all in perfect order. Close to the nearer end of the writing table, a revolving bookcase, containing the Encyclopædia Britannica and other books of reference. On the top of it a tantalus with a syphon and glasses. Close up to the writing table, and about of equal length, a deeply upholstered green leather sofa. Further over towards the left, a small table with smoking appliances. On each side of the table a comfortable green leather arm-chair. No small chairs. Low bookcases, filled with serious-looking modern books, against the walls, wherever there is space for them. On the top of one of the bookcases a large bronze bust of Napoleon. A black and white portrait of Nietzsche on the wall, along with some sporting prints.

CRESPIN *discovered alone, wandering around the room, nervous and irritable. He tries the door at back; it is locked. Opens the door down left, and closes it, muttering "Billiards, begad!" Crosses to the writing table, examines the articles upon it, and picks up a paper which proves to be "La Vie Parisienne." He throws it down with the comment, "French muck!" Notices a paper on the couch, picks it up and says with disgust, "Russian." Then he comes down to the revolving bookcase, glances at the books and spins it angrily. After a moment's hesitation, he pours some whiskey into a tumbler and fills it from the syphon. Is on the point of drinking, but hesitates, then says, "No!" Goes to the balcony and throws out the contents of the glass. As he is setting the glass down,* TRAHERNE *enters, second door left, ushered in by a* SOLDIER, *who salutes and exit.*

CRESPIN. There! You think you've caught me!

TRAHERNE. Caught you?

CRESPIN. Lushing. But I haven't been. I threw the stuff out of the window. For Lucilla's sake, I must keep all my wits about me.

TRAHERNE. Yes, if we can all do that, we may pull through yet.

CRESPIN. Did you sleep?

TRAHERNE. Not a wink. And you?

CRESPIN. Dozed and woke again fifteen times in a minute. A hellish night.

TRAHERNE. Have you news of Mrs. Crespin?

CRESPIN. She sent me this chit. [*Hands him a scrap of paper.*]

TRAHERNE. [*Reads.*] "Have slept and am feeling better. Keep the flag flying." What pluck she has!

CRESPIN. Yes, she's game—always was.

TRAHERNE. She reminds me of the women in the French Revolution. We might all be in the Conciergerie, waiting to hear the tumbrils.

CRESPIN. It would be more endurable if we w e r e in prison. It's this appearance of freedom—the scoundrel's damned airs of politeness and hospitality—that makes the thing such a nightmare. [*Mechanically mixing himself a whiskey and soda.*] Do you believe we're really awake, Traherne? If I were alone, I'd think the whole thing w a s a blasted nightmare; but Lucilla and you seem to be dreaming it too. [*Raising the glass to his lips, he remembers and puts it down again, saying:*] Damn!

TRAHERNE. Some day we may look back upon it as on a bad dream.

CRESPIN. He does you well, curse him! They served me a most dainty *chota hazri* this morning, and with it a glass of rare old *fine champagne.*

TRAHERNE. [*Pointing to the door, down left.*] Where does that door lead?

CRESPIN. To a billiard-room. Billiards! Ha, ha!

TRAHERNE. [*At door, centre.*] And this one?

CRESPIN. I don't know. It's locked—and a very solid door, too.

TRAHERNE. Do you know what I think?

CRESPIN. Yes, and I agree with you.

TRAHERNE. Opening off the fellow's own sanctum—

CRESPIN. It's probably the wireless room. [*They exchange significant glances.*]

TRAHERNE. [*Indicating the window.*] And what's out here?

CRESPIN. Take a look.

TRAHERNE. [*Looking over.*] A sheer drop of a hundred feet.

CRESPIN. And a dry torrent below. How if we were to pick up our host, Traherne, and gently drop him on those razor-edged rocks?

TRAHERNE. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] As he said last night, they'd only tear us to pieces the quicker.

CRESPIN. If it weren't for Lucilla, I'm damned if I wouldn't do it all the same.

[*The* RAJA *enters, second door left, dressed in spick-and-span up-to-date riding attire. He crosses to the writing table.*]

RAJA. Good morning, Major; good morning, Doctor. How do you like my snuggery? I hope you have slept well? [*They make no answer.*] No? Ah, perhaps you find this altitude trying? Never mind. We have methods of dealing with insomnia.

CRESPIN. Come now, Raja, a joke's a joke, but this cat-and-mouse business gets on one's nerves. Make arrangements to send us back to the nearest British outpost, and we'll give you our Bible oath to say nothing about the—pleasantry you've played on us.

RAJA. Send you back, my dear Major? I assure you, if I were ever so willing, it would be as much as my place is worth. You don't know how my faithful subjects are looking forward to tomorrow's ceremony. If I tried to cancel it, there would be a revolution. You must be reasonable, my dear sir.

CRESPIN. Do you think we would truckle to you, damn you, if it weren't for my wife's sake? But for her we'll make any concession—promise you anything.

RAJA. What can you promise that is worth a brass farthing to me? [*With sudden ferocity.*] No. Asia has a long score against you swaggering, blustering, whey-faced lords of creation, and, by all the gods! I mean to see some of it paid tomorrow! [*Resuming his*

suave manner.] But in the meantime there is no reason why we shouldn't behave like civilized beings. How would you like to pass the morning? I'm sorry I can't offer you any shooting. I mustn't lead you into temptation. What do you say to billiards? It soothes the nerves. [*Opening the door.*] Here is the billiard-room. I have a little business to attend to, but I'll join you presently.

CRESPIN. Of all the infernal purring devils—!

RAJA. Dignity, Major, dignity!

[TRAHERNE *interposes and shepherds the* MAJOR *off. The click of billiard-balls is presently heard. The* RAJA *seats himself at the writing table and presses a bell. Then he takes up a pad of paper and pencil, and taps his teeth, cogitating what to write. In a few moments* WATKINS *enters.*]

WATKINS. Your Highness rang?

RAJA. Come in, Watkins. Just close the billiard-room door, will you? [WATKINS *looks into the billiard-room and then closes the door.*]

WATKINS. They're good pluck'd uns, sir; I will say that.

RAJA. Yes, there's some satisfaction in handling them. I'm glad they're not abject—it would quite spoil the sport.

WATKINS. Quite so, sir.

RAJA. But it has occurred to me, Watkins, that perhaps it's not quite safe to have them so near the wireless room. Their one chance would be to get into communication with India. They appeared last night to know nothing about the wireless, but I have my doubts. Tell me, Watkins—have they made any attempt to bribe you?

WATKINS. Not yet, sir.

RAJA. Ha, that looks bad. It looks as if they had something else up their sleeves, and were leaving bribery to the last resort. I want to test their ignorance of wireless. I want you, in their presence, to send out some message that is bound to startle or enrage them, and see if they show any sign of understanding it.

WATKINS. [*Grinning.*] That's a notion, sir.

RAJA. But I can't think of a message.

[*The* AYAH *opens the second door, left, ushers in* LUCILLA, *and exit.* LUCILLA *has resumed her travelling dress. The* RAJA *has been examining the lock of the wireless room, and is thus partly concealed by the entrance door as it opens, so that* LUCILLA *is well into the room before she observes him. He comes forward.*]

RAJA. Ah, Mrs. Crespin, I was just thinking of you. Think of angels and you hear their wings. Won't you sit down?

LUCILLA. [*Ignoring his invitation.*] I thought my husband was here.

RAJA. He's not far off. [*To* WATKINS, *pointing to the centre door.*] Just wait in there for a few minutes; I may have instructions for you.

[WATKINS *produces a key-ring, selects a key, unlocks the door of the wireless-room, and goes in, closing the door behind him.*]

RAJA. [*To* LUCILLA, *who has stood motionless.*] Do, pray, sit down. I want so much to have a chat with you. [LUCILLA *seats herself, in silence.*] I hope you had everything you required?

LUCILLA. Everything.

RAJA. The ayah?

LUCILLA. Was most attentive.

RAJA. And you slept—?

LUCILLA. More or less.

RAJA. More rather than less, if one may judge by your looks.

LUCILLA. Does it matter?

RAJA. What can matter more than the looks of a beautiful woman?

LUCILLA. [*Listening.*] What's that?

RAJA. The click of billiard-balls. Your husband and Dr. Traherne are passing the time.

LUCILLA. [*Rising.*] If you'll excuse me, I'll join them.

RAJA. Oh, pray spare me a few moments. I want to speak to you seriously.

LUCILLA. [*Sitting down again.*] Well—I am listening.

RAJA. You are very curt, Mrs. Crespin. I'm afraid you bear me malice,—you hold me responsible for the doubtless trying situation in which you find yourself.

LUCILLA. Who else is responsible?

RAJA. Who? Why chance, fate, the gods, Providence—whoever, or whatever, pulls the strings of this unaccountable puppet-show. Did *I* bring you here? Did *I* conjure up the fog? Could *I* have prevented your dropping from the skies? And when once you had set foot in the Goddess's precinct, it was utterly out of my power to save you—at any rate the men of your party. If I raised a finger to thwart the Goddess, it would be the end of my rule—perhaps of my life.

LUCILLA. You know that is not true. You could easily smuggle us away, and then face the people out. What about your troops?

RAJA. A handful, dear lady—a toy army. It amuses me to play at soldiers. They could do nothing against priests and people, even if they were to be depended upon. And they, too, worship the Goddess.

LUCILLA. What you really mean, Raja, is that you dare not risk it—you haven't the courage.

RAJA. You take a mean advantage, Madam. You abuse the privilege of your sex in order to taunt me with cowardice.

LUCILLA. Let us say, then, that you haven't the w i l l to save us.

RAJA. Reflect one moment, Madam—why s h o u l d I have the will, at the risk of all I possess, to save Major Crespin and Dr. Traherne? Major Crespin is your husband—does t h a t recommend him to me? Forgive me if I venture to guess that it doesn't greatly recommend him to y o u . He is an only too typical specimen of a breed I detest: pigheaded, bull-necked, blustering, overbearing. Dr. Traherne is an agreeable man enough—I daresay a man of genius—

LUCILLA. If you kill him—if you cut short his work—you kill millions of your own race, whom he would have saved.

RAJA. I don't know that I care very much about the millions you speak of. Life is a weed that grows again as fast as death mows it down. At all events, he is an Englishman, a Feringhi—and, may I add, without indiscretion, that the interest you take in him—oh, the merest friendly interest, I am sure—does not endear him to me. One is, after all, a man, and the favour shown to another man by a beautiful woman — [LUCILLA *rises and moves toward the billiard-room. The* RAJA *interproses.*] Please, please, Mrs. Crespin, bear with me if I transgress your Western conventions. Can I help being an Oriental? Believe me, I mean no harm; I wanted to talk to you about—

LUCILLA. Well?

RAJA. You spoke last night of—your children. [Lu-

CILLA *turns away, her self-control wavering.*] I think you said—a boy and a little girl.

LUCILLA. [*Throws herself down on the couch in a fit of weeping.*] My babies, my babies!

RAJA. I feel for you, Mrs. Crespin, I do indeed. I would do anything—

LUCILLA. [*Looking up, vehemently.*] Prince, if I write them a letter of farewell, will you give me your word of honour that it shall reach them?

RAJA. Ah, there, Madam, you must pardon me! I have already said that the last thing I desire is to attract the attention of the Government of India.

LUCILLA. I will say nothing to show where I am, or what has befallen me. You shall read it yourself.

RAJA. An ingenious idea! You would have it come fluttering down out of the blue upon your children's heads, like a message from a Mahatma. But, the strength of my position, you see, is that no one will ever know what has become of you. You will simply disappear in the uncharted sea of the Himalayas, as a ship sinks with all hands in the ocean. If I permitted any word from you to reach India, the detective instinct, so deeply implanted in your race, would be awakened, and the Himalayas would be combed out with a tooth-comb. No, Madam, I cannot risk it.

LUCILLA. [*Her calm recovered.*] Cannot? You dare not! But you can and dare kill defenceless men and women. Raja, you are a pitiful coward.

RAJA. Forgive me if I smile at your tactics. You want to goad me into chivalry. If every man were a coward who took life without risking his own, where would your British sportsmen be?

LUCILLA. I beg your pardon—a savage is not necsarily a coward. And now let me go to my husband.

RAJA. Not yet, Mrs. Crespin—one more word. You are a brave woman, and I sincerely admire you—

LUCILLA. Please—please—

RAJA. Listen to me. It will be worth your while. I could not undertake to send a letter to your children—but it would be very easy for me to have them carried off and brought to you here.

LUCILLA. [*Starts, and faces him.*] What do you mean?

RAJA. I mean that, in less than a month, you may have your children in your arms, uninjured, unsuspecting, happy—if—

LUCILLA. If?

RAJA. If—oh, in your own time, of your own free will—you will accept the homage it would be my privilege to offer you.

LUCILLA. That!

RAJA. You have the courage to die, dear lady—why not have the courage to live?

[*Pause.*]

You believe, I daresay, that tomorrow, when the ordeal is over, you will awaken in a new life, and that there your children will rejoin you. Suppose it were so: suppose that in forty—fifty—sixty years, they passed over to you: would they be your children? Can God Himself give you back their childhood? What I offer you is a new life, not problematical, but assured; a new life, without passing through the shadow of death; a future utterly cut off from the past, except that your children will be with you, not as vague shades, but living and loving. They must be quite young; they would soon forget all that had gone before. They would grow to manhood and womanhood under your eyes; and ultimately, perhaps, when the whole story was for-

gotten, you might, if you wished it, return with them to what you call civilization.

And meanwhile, you are only on the threshold of the best years of your life. You would pass them, not as a memsahib in a paltry Indian cantonment, but as the absolute queen of an absolute king. I do not talk to you of romantic love. I respect you too much to think you accessible to silly sentiment. But that is just it: I respect as much as I admire you; and I have never pretended to respect any other woman. Therefore I say you should be my first and only Queen. Your son, if you gave me one, should be the prince of princes; my other sons should all bow down to him and serve him. For, though I hate the arrogance of Europe, I believe that from a blending of the flower of the East with the flower of the West, the man of the future—the Superman—may be born.

[LUCILLA *has sat motionless through all this speech, her elbows on the end of the couch, twisting her handkerchief in her hands and gazing straight in front of her. There is now a perceptible pause before she speaks in a toneless voice.*]

LUCILLA. Is that all? Have you quite done?

RAJA. I beg you to answer.

LUCILLA. I can't answer the greater part of what you have been saying, for I have not heard it; at least I have not understood it. All I have heard is "In less than a month you may have your children in your arms," and then again, "Can God Himself give you back their childhood?" These words have kept hammering at my brain till—[*Showing her handkerchief.*] you see—I have bit my lip to keep

from shrieking aloud. I think the devil must have put them in your mouth—

RAJA. Pooh! You don't believe in these old bugbears.

LUCILLA. Perhaps not. But there is such a thing as diabolical temptation, and you have stumbled upon the secret of it.

RAJA. Stumbled!

LUCILLA. Mastered the art of it, if you like—but not in your long harangue. All I can think of is, "Can God Himself give you back their childhood?" and "In a month you may have them in your arms."

RAJA. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, yes—think of that. In three or four weeks you may have your little ones—

LUCILLA. [*Rising and interrupting him vehemently.*] Yes—but on what conditions? That I should desert my husband and my friend—should let them go alone to their death—should cower in some back room of this murderous house of yours, listening to the ticking of the clock, and thinking, "Now—now—the stroke has fallen"—stopping my ears so as not to hear the yells of your bloodthirsty savages—and yet, perhaps, hearing nothing else to my dying day. No, Prince!—you said something about not passing through the shadow of death; but if I did this I should not pass through it, but live in it, and bring my children into it as well. What would be the good of having them in my arms if I could not look them in the face? [*She passes to the billiard-room door.*]

RAJA. That is your answer?

LUCILLA. The only possible answer. [*She enters the billiard-room and closes the door.*]

RAJA. [*Looking after her, to himself:*] But not the last word, my lady!

[*He sits at the writing table, and begins to write, at the same time calling, not very loudly,* "WATKINS!" *The valet immediately appears, centre.*]

WATKINS. Yessir?

RAJA. [*Tearing a sheet off the pad and handing it to him.*] Read that.

WATKINS. A message to be sent out, sir?

RAJA. Yes.

WATKINS. [*Reading.*] "The lady has come to terms. She will enter His Highness's household." Quite so, sir. What suite will she occupy?

RAJA. My innocent Watkins! Do you think it's true? What have I to do with a stuck-up Englishwoman? It's only a bait for the Feringhis. You shall send it out in their hearing, and if either of them can read the Morse code, the devil's in it if he doesn't give himself away.

WATKINS. Beg pardon, sir; I didn't quite catch on.

RAJA. If they move an eyelash I'll take care they never see the inside of this room again.

WATKINS. Am I to send this to India, sir?

RAJA. To anywhere or nowhere. Reduce the current, so that no one can pick it up. So long as it's heard in this room, that's all I want.

WATKINS. But when am I to send it, sir?

RAJA. Listen. I'll get them in here on the pretext of a little wireless demonstration, and then I'll tell you to send out an order to Tashkent for champagne. That'll be your cue. Go ahead—and send slowly.

WATKINS. Shall I ask you whether I'm to code it, sir?

RAJA. You may as well. It'll give artistic finish to the thing.

WATKINS. Very good, Your 'Ighness. But afterwards,

—if, as you was saying, they was to try to corrupt me, sir—

RAJA. Corrupt y o u ? That would be painting the lily with a vengeance.

WATKINS. [*With a touch of annoyance.*] Suppose they tries to get at me, sir—what are your instructions?

RAJA. How do you mean?

WATKINS. Shall I let on to take the bait?

RAJA. You may do exactly as you please. I have the most implicit confidence in you, Watkins.

WATKINS. You are very good, sir.

RAJA. I know that anything they can offer you would have to be paid either in England or in India, and that you daren't show your nose in either country. You have a very comfortable job here—

WATKINS. My grateful thanks to you, sir.

RAJA. And you don't want to give the hangman a job, either in Lahore or in London.

WATKINS. The case in a nutshell, sir. But I thought if I was to p r e t e n d to send a message for them, it might keep them quiet-like.

RAJA. Very true, Watkins. It would not only keep them quiet, but the illusion of security would raise their spirits, which would be a humane action. I am always on the side of humanity.

WATKINS. Just so, sir. Then I'll humour them.

RAJA. Yes, if they want you to send a message. If they try to "get at," not only you, but the instrument, call the guard and let me know at once.

WATKINS. Certainly, sir.

RAJA. Now open the door and stand by. You have the message?

WATKINS. [*Producing the slip from his pocket, reads:*] "The lady has come to terms. She—"

RAJA. [*Interrupting.*] Yes, that's right. [*As* WATKINS *is opening the door.*] Oh, look here—when you've finished, you'd better lock the door, and say, "Any orders, sir?" If I say "No orders, Watkins," it'll mean I'm satisfied they don't understand. If I think they do understand, I'll give you what orders I think necessary.

WATKINS. Very good, sir.

[*He opens the folding doors wide, revealing a small room, in which is a wireless installation.*]

RAJA. [*At billiard-room door.*] Oh, Major, you were saying you had no experience of wireless. If you've finished your game, it might amuse you to see it at work. Watkins is just going to send out a message. Would Mrs. Crespin care to come?

CRESPIN. [*At door.*] Yes—why not? Will you come, Lucilla?

[CRESPIN *enters, followed by* LUCILLA *and* TRAHERNE. *The* RAJA *eyes them closely so that they have no opportunity to make any sign to each other.*]

RAJA. This, you see, is the apparatus. All ready, Watkins? [*To the others:*] Won't you sit down? [*To* WATKINS:] You have the order for Tashkent?

WATKINS. [*Producing paper.*] Yes, Your 'Ighness; but I haven't coded it.

RAJA. Oh, never mind; send it in clear. Even if some outsider does pick it up, I daresay we can order three cases of champagne without causing international complications.

[CRESPIN *and* TRAHERNE *sit in the arm-chairs, left.* LUCILLA *is about to sit on the couch, but seeing the* RAJA *make a move to sit beside her, she passes behind the writing table and sits in the*

swivel chair. The RAJA *sits on the sofa.* WATKINS *begins to transmit,—pauses.*]

RAJA. He's waiting for the reply signal.

[*A pause.*]

CRESPIN. May I take one of your excellent cigars, Raja?

RAJA. By all means.

[CRESPIN *lights a cigar.*]

WATKINS. I've got them. [*Proceeds to send the message: "The lady has come to terms," etc.*]

CRESPIN. [*A moment after the transmission has begun, says in a low voice to the* RAJA:] May we speak?

RAJA. Oh, yes—you won't be heard in Tashkent.

CRESPIN. [*Holding out his cigarette case.*] Have a cigarette, Traherne.

TRAHERNE. Thanks. [*He takes a cigarette.* CRESPIN *strikes a match and lights the cigarette, saying meanwhile:*]

CRESPIN. Let us smoke and drink, for tomorrow we— [*Blows out the match.*]

[*Silence until the transmission ends.*]

RAJA. That's how it's done!

TRAHERNE. How many words did he send?

RAJA. What was it, Watkins? "Forward by tomorrow's caravan twelve cases champagne. Usual brand. Charge our account"; was that it?

WATKINS. That's right, sir.

RAJA. Twelve words.

CRESPIN. And can they really make sense out of these fireworks?

RAJA. I hope so—else we shall run short of champagne.

WATKINS. [*Locking the folding door.*] Any orders, Your 'Ighness?

RAJA. No orders, Watkins.

[*As he is going out,* WATKINS *meets at the door a* SOLDIER, *who says a few words to him.*]

WATKINS. [*Turning.*] The 'Igh Priest is waiting to see Your 'Ighness.

RAJA. Oh, show him in.

[WATKINS *ushers in the* HIGH PRIEST OF THE GODDESS, *and then exit. The* HIGH PRIEST'S *personality is unmistakably sinister. The* RAJA, *after a word of greeting, turns to the others.*]

RAJA. I mentioned my Archbishop of York. This is he. Allow me to introduce you. Your Grace, Mrs. Crespin—Major Crespin—Dr. Traherne.

[*The* PRIEST, *understanding the situation, makes a sort of contemptuous salaam.*]

The Archbishop's manners are not good. You will excuse him. He regards you, I regret to say, as unclean creatures, whose very presence means pollution. He would be a mine of information for an anthropologist.

[*He exchanges a few words with the* PRIEST, *and turns again to his guests.*]

His Grace reminds me of some arrangements for tomorrow's ceremony, which, as Archbishop of Canterbury, I must attend to in person. You will excuse me for half an hour? Pray make yourselves at home. Tiffin at half past twelve.

[*He speaks a few words to the* PRIEST, *who replies in a sort of growl.*]

His Grace says *au revoir*—and so do I

[*Exit, followed by the* PRIEST. *Both* TRAHERNE *and* LUCILLA *are about to speak.* CRESPIN *motions them to be cautious. He goes to the billiard-room, opens the door, looks around and*

closes it again. LUCILLA *examines the balcony.* TRAHERNE *slips up to the centre door and noiselessly tests it.*]

TRAHERNE. [*To* CRESPIN.] What was the message?

CRESPIN. It said that the lady had accepted her life —on his terms.

TRAHERNE. Oh!—a trap for us.

CRESPIN. Yes. A put-up job.

LUCILLA. You gave no sign, Antony. I think he must have been reassured.

TRAHERNE. Evidently; or he wouldn't have left us here.

CRESPIN. What to do now?

TRAHERNE. Can we break open the door?

CRESPIN. No good. It would make a noise. We'd be interrupted, and then it would be all up.

TRAHERNE. Well, then, the next step is to try to bribe Watkins.

CRESPIN. I don't believe it's a bit of good.

TRAHERNE. Nor I. The fellow's a thorough-paced scoundrel. But we m i g h t succeed, and if we don't even try they'll suspect that we're plotting something else. If we can convince them that we're at our wits' end, we've the better chance of taking them off their guard.

LUCILLA. Yes—you see that, Antony?

CRESPIN. Perhaps you're right. But, even if the damned scoundrel can be bought, what good is it if I can't remember the wave-length and the call for Amil-Serai?

LUCILLA. You'll think of it all of a sudden.

CRESPIN. Not if I keep racking my brains for it. If I could get my mind off it, the damned thing might come back to me.

TRAHERNE. All the more reason for action. But first, we must settle what message to send if we get the chance.

LUCILLA. [*Sits at writing-table.*] Dictate—I'll write.

TRAHERNE. What about this? "Major Crespin, wife, Traherne imprisoned, Rukh, Raja's palace, lives in danger."

[LUCILLA *writes on an envelope which she takes from the paper-case.*]

CRESPIN. We want something more definite.

LUCILLA. How would this do? "Death threatened tomorrow evening. Rescue urgent."

TRAHERNE. Excellent.

[LUCILLA *finishes the message, and hands it to* CRESPIN.]

CRESPIN. [*Reads.*] "Major Crespin, wife, Traherne, imprisoned, Rukh, Raja's palace. Death threatened tomorrow evening. Rescue urgent." [*Takes the paper.*] Right. I'll keep it ready.

TRAHERNE. Now, how to get hold of Watkins?

LUCILLA. [*At the table.*] There's a bell here. Shall I try it?

TRAHERNE. Hold on a moment. We have to decide what to do if he won't take money, and we have to use force in order to get his keys.

CRESPIN. [*Looking around.*] There's nothing here to knock him on the head with—not even a chair you can lift—

TRAHERNE. Not a curtain cord to truss him up with—

LUCILLA. The first thing would be to gag him, wouldn't it? [*Takes off her scarf.*] Would this do for that?

TRAHERNE. Capital! [*Takes the scarf, ties a knot in it, and places it on the upper end of the sofa.*]

CRESPIN. What about a billiard cue?

TRAHERNE. If he saw it around he'd smell a rat.

CRESPIN. Then there's only one thing—

TRAHERNE. What? [CRESPIN *points to the balcony, and makes a significant gesture.*]

LUCILLA. Oh! [*Shrinks away from the window.*]

TRAHERNE. I'm afraid it can't be helped. There's a drop of a good hundred feet.

CRESPIN. None too much for him.

TRAHERNE. When he locked that door he put the key in his trousers pocket. We must remember to get it before—

LUCILLA. But if you kill him and still don't remember the call, we shall be no better off than we are now.

TRAHERNE. We shall be no worse off.

CRESPIN. Better, by Jove! For if I can get three minutes at that instrument, the Raja can't tell whether we have communicated or not. [*He takes up the glass of whiskey-and-soda which he has poured out before.*]

LUCILLA. Oh, Antony!

CRESPIN. Don't be a fool, Lu. [*Gulps down the drink, and says as he pours out more whiskey:*] It's because I'm so unnaturally sober that my brain won't work. [*Drinks the whiskey raw.*] Now ring that bell. [LUCILLA *does so.*] You do the talking, Traherne. The fellow's damned insolence gets on my nerves.

TRAHERNE. All right. [*Sits at the writing table.*]

CRESPIN. Look out—

[*Enter* WATKINS, *second door, left.*]

WATKINS. You rang, sir? [*Standing by the door.*]

TRAHERNE. Yes, Watkins, we want a few words with you. Do you mind coming over here? We don't want to speak loud.

WATKINS. There's no one understands English, sir.

TRAHERNE. Please oblige me, all the same.

WATKINS. [*Coming forward.*] Now, sir!

TRAHERNE. I daresay you can guess what we want with you.

WATKINS. I'm no 'and at guessin', sir. I'd rather you'd put it plain.

TRAHERNE. Well, you know that we've fallen into the hands of bloodthirsty savages? You know what is proposed for tomorrow?

WATKINS. I've 'eard as your numbers is up.

TRAHERNE. You surely don't intend to stand by and see us murdered—three of your own people, and one of them a lady?

WATKINS. My own people, is it? And a l a d y —!

LUCILLA. A woman, then, Watkins.

WATKINS. What has my own people ever done for me —or women either—that I should lose a cushy job and risk my neck for the sake of the three of you? I wouldn't do it for all your bloomin' England, I tell you straight.

CRESPIN. It's no good, Traherne. Come down to tin tacks.

TRAHERNE. Only a sighting shot, Major. It was just possible we might have misread our man.

WATKINS. You did if you took 'im for a V. C. 'ero wot 'ud lay down his life for England, 'ome and beauty. The first thing England ever done for me was to 'ave me sent to a reformatory for pinching a silver rattle off of a young haristocrat in a p'rambulator. That, and the likes of that, is wot I've got to thank England for. And why did I do it? Because my mother would have bashed my face in if I'd have come back empty-handed. That's wot 'ome and

beauty has meant for me. W'y should I care more for a woman being scragged than what I do for a man?

TRAHERNE. Ah, yes, I quite see your point of view. But the question now is: What'll you t a k e to get us out of this?

WATKINS. Get you out of this! If you was to offer me millions, 'ow could I do that?

TRAHERNE. By going into that room and sending this message through to the Amil-Serai aerodrome.

[CRESPIN *hands* WATKINS *the message. He reads it through and places it on the table.*]

WATKINS. So that's the game, is it?

TRAHERNE. That, as you say, is the game.

WATKINS. You know what you're riskin'?

TRAHERNE. What do you mean?

WATKINS. W'y, if the Guv'nor suspected as you'd got a word through to India, ten to one he'd wipe you off the slate like that [*snapping his fingers*] without waiting for tomorrow.

CRESPIN. That makes no difference. We've got to face it.

TRAHERNE. Come now! On your own showing, Mr. Watkins, loyalty to your master oughtn't to stand in your way. I don't suppose gratitude is one of your weaknesses.

WATKINS. Gratitude! To 'im? What for? I'm not badly off here, to be sure, but it's nothing to wot I does for 'im; and I 'ate 'im for 'is funny little ways. D'you think I don't see that he's always pulling my leg?

TRAHERNE. Well, then, you won't mind selling him. We've only to settle the price.

WATKINS. That's all very fine, sir; but what price 'ave you gents to offer?

TRAHERNE. Nothing down—no spot cash—that's clear. You'll have to take our word for whatever bargain we come to.

WATKINS. Your word! How do I know—?

TRAHERNE. Oh, our written word. We'll give it to you in writing.

WATKINS. [*After thinking for a moment.*] If I was to 'elp you out, there must be no more fairy-tales about any of you 'avin' seen me in India.

TRAHERNE. All right. We accept your assurance that you never were there.

WATKINS. And see here, Dr. Traherne—you know very well I couldn't stay here after I'd helped you to escape—leastways, if I stayed, it'd be in my grave. You'll 'ave to take me with you—and for that I can only have your word. Supposing you could get the message through, and the English was to come, no writing could bind you if you chose to leave me in the lurch.

TRAHERNE. Quite true. I'm afraid you'll have to trust us for that. But I give you my word of honour that we would be as careful of your safety as if you were one of ourselves. I suppose you know that, strange as you may think it, there a r e people in the world that would rather die than break a solemn promise.

CRESPIN. Even to a hound like you, Watkins.

WATKINS. I advise you to keep a civil tongue in yer 'ead, Major. Don't forget that I 'ave you in the 'ollow of my 'and.

TRAHERNE. True, Watkins; and the hollow of your hand is a very disagreeable place to be in. That's

why we're willing to pay well to get out of it. Come, now, what shall we say?

WATKINS. Well, what about a little first instalment? You ain't quite on your uppers, are you, now? You could come down with something, be it ever so humble?

TRAHERNE. [*Examining his pocket-book.*] I have 300 rupees and five ten-pound notes. [*Places the money on the table.*]

WATKINS. And you, Major?

CRESPIN. Two hundred and fifty rupees. [*Crosses and lays the notes on the table.*] Oh, and some loose change.

WATKINS. [*Nobly.*] Oh, never mind the chicken-feed! And the lady?

LUCILLA. I gave my last rupee to your wife, Watkins.

WATKINS. Well, that's about £120 to go on with.

TRAHERNE. [*Placing his hand on the heap of notes.*] There. That's your first instalment. Now what about the balance? Shall we say £1000 apiece?

WATKINS. A thousand apiece! Three thousand pounds! You're joking, Dr. Traherne! Wot would £3000 be to me in England? W'y, I'd 'ave to take to valeting again. No, no, sir! If I'm to do this job, I must 'ave enough to make a gentleman of me.

[CRESPIN, TRAHERNE *and* LUCILLA *burst out laughing.*]

WATKINS. Well, you are the queerest lot as ever I come across. Your lives is 'anging by a 'air, and yet you can larf!

LUCILLA. [*Hysterically.*] It's your own fault, Watkins. Why w i l l you be so funny? [*Her laughter turns to tears and she buries her face in the end of the couch, shaken with sobs.*]

TRAHERNE. I'm afraid what you ask is beyond our means, Watkins. But I double my bid—two thousand apiece.

WATKINS. You'll 'ave to double it again, sir, and a little more. You write me out an I. O. U. for fifteen thousand pounds, and I'll see wot can be done.

CRESPIN. Well, you a r e the most consummate—

WATKINS. If your lives ain't worth five thousand apiece to you, there's nothing doing. For my place here is worth fifteen thousand to me. And there's all the risk, too—I'm not charging you nothing for that.

TRAHERNE. We appreciate your generosity, Watkins. Fifteen thousand be it!

WATKINS. Now you're talking.

[TRAHERNE *rapidly writes and signs the I. O. U. and hands it to* WATKINS.]

WATKINS. That's right, sir; but the Major must sign it, too.

CRESPIN. [*Crosses to the table, on which* WATKINS *places the paper, writes, throws down the pen.*] There you are, damn you!

TRAHERNE. Now get to work quick, and call up Amil-Serai.

WATKINS. Right you are, sir. [*Picks up the envelope and begins, in a leisurely way, unlocking the centre door.*]

CRESPIN. Isn't there some special call you must send out to get Amil-Serai?

WATKINS. Oh, yes, sir, I know it.

[WATKINS *takes his seat at the instrument, with his back to the snuggery, and begins to work it.*]

CRESPIN. [*Whispers.*] That's not a service call.

[*A pause.*]

WATKINS. Right! Got them, sir. Now the message.

CRESPIN. [*As* WATKINS *works the key,* CRESPIN *spells out:*] "The—white—goats—are—ready—for—" [*To* TRAHERNE.] No, but the black sheep is! Come on!

[CRESPIN *tiptoes up toward* WATKINS *followed by* TRAHERNE. *As he passes the upper end of the sofa* CRESPIN *picks up* LUCILLA'S *scarf and hands it to* TRAHERNE, *meantime producing his own handkerchief.* LUCILLA *rises, her hand pressed to her mouth. The men steal up close behind* WATKINS. *Suddenly* TRAHERNE *jams the gag in* WATKINS'S *mouth, and ties the ends of the scarf.* WATKINS *attempts a cry, but it trails off into a gurgle.* CRESPIN *meantime grips* WATKINS'S *arms behind, and ties the wrists with his handkerchief.* TRAHERNE *makes fast the gag, and the two lift him, struggling, and carry him towards the window.* WATKINS'S *head falls back, and his terror-stricken eyes can be seen over the swathing gag. They rest him for a moment on the balustrade.*]

TRAHERNE. Must we—?

CRESPIN. Nothing else for it—one, two, three! [*They heave him over.* LUCILLA, *who has been watching, petrified, gives a gasping cry.*]

CRESPIN. At least we haven't taken it lying down! [*He pours out some whiskey and is about to drink when he pauses, puts down the glass, and then cries in great excitement:*] Hold on! Don't speak! [*A Pause.*] I have it! [*Another pause.*] Yes, by God, I have it! I've remembered the call! Can you lock that door?

LUCILLA. [*At second door, left.*] No key this side!

TRAHERNE. [*Whispering, and running to the door.*]

Don't open it. There are soldiers in the passage. I'll hold it. [*He stations himself before the door.* CRESPIN *rushes to the instrument and rapidly examines it.*]

CRESPIN. The scoundrel had reduced the current. [*Makes an adjustment with feverish haste.*] Now the wave length! [*More adjustment. He begins to transmit. A pause.*]

TRAHERNE. Do you get any answer?

CRESPIN. No, no; I don't expect any—I'm sure they haven't the power. But it's an even chance that I get them all the same. [*He goes on transmitting hurriedly while* TRAHERNE *and* LUCILLA *stand breathless,* TRAHERNE *with his shoulder to the door.*]

TRAHERNE. Some one's coming up the passage! Go on! Go on! I'll hold the door.

[*Another slight pause, while* CRESPIN *transmits feverishly. Suddenly* TRAHERNE *braces himself against the door, gripping the handle. After a moment, there is a word of command outside, the sound of shoulders heaved against the door, and it is gradually pushed open by three guards.* TRAHERNE *is shoved back by its motion.*]

[*The* RAJA *enters, rushes forward and grasps the situation.*]

RAJA. Ah! When the cat's away—

[*He whips out a revolver and fires.*]

CRESPIN. Got me, by God!

[*He falls forward over the instrument, but immediately recovers himself, and rapidly unmakes the adjustments.* LUCILLA *and* TRAHERNE *catch him as he staggers back from the instrument, and lay him on the couch.*]

TRAHERNE. [*kneeling and supporting him.*] Brandy!

[LUCILLA *gets the glass. They put it to his lips.*]

[*The* RAJA *meanwhile goes to the wireless table, sees the draft message and reads it.*]

RAJA. [*Holding out the paper.*] How much of this did you get through?

CRESPIN. [*Raising himself a little.*] Damn you—none! [*Falls back dead.*]

LUCILLA. [*Crying out.*] Antony!

RAJA. All over, eh?

[TRAHERNE, *still kneeling, makes an affirmative sign.*]

[*At this moment a noise is heard outside, and three soldiers burst open the door and rush in. One of them speaks to the* RAJA, *pointing to the window, the other two rush up to* TRAHERNE, *seize him and drag him over to the left.* LUCILLA *remains kneeling by* CRESPIN'S *body. The* RAJA *goes calmly over to the window and looks out.*]

RAJA. [*Returning to centre.*] Tut tut—most inconvenient. And foolish on your part—for now, if my brothers should be reprieved, we cannot hear of it. [*Looks at the message reflectively.*] Otherwise, the situation remains unchanged. We adhere to our programme for tomorrow. The Major has only a few hours' start of you.

CURTAIN

ACT FOURTH

A gloomy hall, its roof supported by four wooden columns, two in a row, rudely carved with distorted animal and human figures. The walls are also of rudely-carved wood, and are pierced all round, at the height of about twelve feet, by a sort of clerestory—a series of oblong slits or unglazed windows through which the sky can be seen. The general tone of the wood is dark brown, but the interstices between the carvings have here and there been filled in with dull red. There is a high curtained doorway, left, leading to a sort of robing-room. Opposite to it, right, a two-leaved wooden door, closed with a heavy wooden bolt. An oblong hole in the door, with a sliding shutter, enables the guard within to inspect whoever approaches from without. At the back, centre, is a wide opening, curtained at the beginning of the Act. When the curtains are withdrawn, they reveal a sort of balcony or tribune, raised by two steps above the level of the hall, over the balustrade of which can be seen the head and shoulders of a colossal image of the Goddess, apparently at a distance of some fifty yards. Between the two foremost columns, on a dais of two steps, a wide throne, which has for its backing a figure of the Goddess carved in high relief, amid a good deal of barbaric tracery. The figure is green, but there are touches of gold in her crown, her ornaments, and in the tracery. A low brazier rests on the ground in front of the throne.

The hall is a sort of anteroom to the public place of sacrifice without.

Late afternoon light comes in through the clerestory on the left.

When the curtain rises, a group of Priests is gathered round the doorway, left, while the CHIEF PRIEST *stands at the centre, holding the curtains a little way apart and looking out. A Priest is on guard at the door, right.*

For a moment after the rise of the curtain, there is a regular and subdued murmur from the crowd without. Then it swells into a chorus of execrations. The CHIEF PRIEST *gives an order to the other Priests, left, one of whom goes off through the doorway. The guard at the door, right, slips back the shutter and looks out, then unbolts the door, and admits* TRAHERNE, *strapped to a mountain chair, and guarded by two soldiers, who withdraw. At the same time, the* RAJA, *in splendid Eastern attire, enters, left.*

RAJA. Well, Doctor, it doesn't appear that any "god from the machine" is going to interfere with our programme.

TRAHERNE. You are bringing a terrible vengeance upon yourself.

RAJA. Think, my dear Doctor. If, as the Major said, he did n o t get your S. O. S. through, I have nothing to fear. If he lied, and d i d get it through, nothing can ultimately save me, and I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.

TRAHERNE. [*Writhing in his bonds.*] You might have spared me this!

RAJA. A ritual detail, Doctor; not quite without reason. Persons lacking in self-control might throw them-

selves to the ground or otherwise disarrange the ceremony. [*He speaks a word, and the bearers promptly release* TRAHERNE, *and carry the chair out, right.*]

TRAHERNE. What have you done with Mrs. Crespin?

RAJA. Don't be alarmed. She'll be here in due time.

TRAHERNE. Listen to me, Raja. Do what you will with me, but let Mrs. Crespin go. Send her to India or to Russia, and I am sure, for her children's sake, she will swear to keep absolute silence as to her husband's fate and mine.

RAJA. You don't believe, then, that I couldn't save you if I would?

TRAHERNE. Believe it? No!

RAJA. You are quite right, my dear Doctor. I am not a High Priest for nothing. I might work the oracle. I might get a command from the Goddess to hurt no hair upon your heads.

TRAHERNE. Then what devilish pleasure do you find in putting us to death?

RAJA. Pleasure? The pleasure of a double vengeance. Vengeance for today—my brothers—and vengeance for centuries of subjection and insult. Do you know what brought you here? It was not blind chance, any more than it was the Goddess. It was my will, my craving for revenge, that drew you here by a subtle, irresistible magnetism. My will is my religion—my god. And by that god I have sworn that you shall not escape me.

[*Yells from the crowd outside.*]

Ah, they are bringing Mrs. Crespin.

[*The* PRIEST *unbolts the door, right, and* LUCILLA *is carried in.*]

RAJA. I apologize, Madam, for the manners of my people. Their fanaticism is beyond my control.

[*He says a word to the bearers, who release* LUCILLA. TRAHERNE *gives her his hand, and she steps from the chair, which the bearers remove, right.*]

TRAHERNE. How long have we left?

RAJA. Till the sun's rim touches the crest of the mountain. A blast of our great mountain horn will announce the appointed hour, and you will be led out to the sacred enclosure. You saw the colossal image of the Goddess out yonder?

[*He points to the back. They look at each other in silence.*]

TRAHERNE. Will you grant us one last request?

RAJA. By all means, if it is in my power. In spite of your inconsiderate action of yesterday—

TRAHERNE. Inconsiderate—?

RAJA. Watkins, you know—poor Watkins—a great loss to me! But *à la guerre comme à la guerre!* I bear no malice for a fair act of war. I am anxious to show you every consideration.

TRAHERNE. Then you will leave us alone for the time that remains to us.

RAJA. Why, by all means. And oh, by the way, you need have no fear of the—ceremony—being protracted. It will be brief and—I trust—painless. The High Church Party are not incapable of cruelty; but I have resolutely set my face against it. [LUCILLA *has meanwhile stood stonily gazing straight in front of her. The* RAJA *reflects for a moment, and then goes up to her.*] Before I go, Madam, may I remind you of my offer of yesterday? It is not yet too late. [LUCILLA *takes no notice.*] Is it just to your children to refuse? [*She looks at him stonily, saying nothing. After a pause.*] Immovable? So be it! [*He turns to go.*

At this moment a great yell of triumphant hatred goes up from the populace.]

RAJA. Your husband's body, Madam. They are laying it at the feet of the Goddess.

LUCILLA. You promised me—

RAJA. That it should be burnt. I will keep my promise. But you see I had three brothers—a head for a head.

[*He goes into the inner chamber, encircled by his Priests. Only the* GUARD *at the door, right, remains, half hidden by the door jamb.*]

[LUCILLA *and* TRAHERNE *are left alone.* LUCILLA *sinks down upon the broad base of the foremost pillar, left.*]

LUCILLA. So this is the end!

TRAHERNE. What offer did that devil make you?

LUCILLA. Oh, I didn't mean to tell you, but I may as well. He is an ingenious tormentor. He offered yesterday to let me live, and to kidnap the children and bring them here to me—you know on what terms.

TRAHERNE. To bring the children here?

LUCILLA. He said in a month I might have them in my arms. Think of it! Ronny and Iris in my arms! [*A pause.* TRAHERNE *stands with his back to her.*]

TRAHERNE. [*In a low and unsteady voice.*] Are you sure you did right to refuse?

LUCILLA. Do you mean—?

TRAHERNE. [*Louder and almost harshly.*] Are you sure it is not wrong to refuse?

LUCILLA. Oh, how can you—? Right? Wrong? What are right and wrong to me now? If I could see my children again, would any scruple of "right" or "wrong" make me shrink from anything that was possible? But this is so utterly, utterly impossible.

TRAHERNE. Forgive me. You know it would add an unspeakable horror to death if I had to leave you here. But I felt I must ask you whether you had fully considered—

LUCILLA. I have thought of nothing else through all these torturing hours.

TRAHERNE. How brave you are!

LUCILLA. Not brave, not brave. If I could live, I would—there, I confess it! But I should die of shame and misery, and leave my children—to that man. Or, if I did live, what sort of a mother should I be to them? They would be much better without me! Oh, my precious, precious darlings!

[*She clasps her arms across her breast, and rocks herself in agony. A short silence.*]

TRAHERNE. [*Lays his hand on her shoulder.*] Lucilla!

LUCILLA. [*Looking up.*] Oh, Basil, say you think it won't be altogether bad for them! They will never know anything of their father now, but what was good. And their mother will simply have vanished into the skies. They will think she has flown away to heaven—and who knows but it may be true? There may be something beyond this hell.

TRAHERNE. We shall know soon, Lucilla.

LUCILLA. But to go away and leave them without a word—! Poor little things, poor little things.

TRAHERNE. They will remember you as something very dear and beautiful. The very mystery will be like a halo about you.

LUCILLA. Shall I see them again, Basil? Tell me that.

[*A pause.*]

TRAHERNE. Who knows? Even to comfort you, I won't say I am certain. But I do sincerely think you may.

LUCILLA. [*Smiling woefully.*] You think there is a sporting chance?

TRAHERNE. More than that. This life is such a miracle —could any other be more incredible?

LUCILLA. But even if I should meet them in another world, they would not be m y Ronny and Iris, but a strange man and a strange woman, built up of experiences in which I had had no share. Oh, it was cunning, cunning, what that devil said to me! He said "God Himself cannot give you back their childhood."

TRAHERNE. How do you know that God is going to take their childhood from you? You may be with them this very night—with them, unseen, but perhaps not unfelt, all the days of their life.

LUCILLA. You are saying that to make what poor Antony called a "haze" for me—to soften the horror of darkness that is waiting for us? Don't give me "dope," Basil—I can face things without it.

TRAHERNE. I mean every word of it. [*A pause.*] Why do you smile?

LUCILLA. At a thought that came to me—the thought of poor Antony as a filmy, purified spirit. It seems so unthinkable.

TRAHERNE. Why unthinkable? Why may he not still exist, though he has left behind him the nerves, the cravings, that tormented him—and you? You have often told me that there was something fine in the depths of his nature; and you know how he showed it yesterday.

LUCILLA. Oh, if I could only tell the children how he died!

TRAHERNE. But his true self was chained to a machine that was hopelessly out of gear. The chain is broken:

the machine lies out there—scrapped. Do you think that he was just that machine, and nothing else?

LUCILLA. I don't know. I only feel that Antony spiritualized would not be Antony. And you, Basil—if Antony leaves his—failings, you must leave behind your work. Do you w a n t another life in which there is no work to be done—no disease to be rooted out? [*With a mournful smile.*] Don't tell me you don't long to take your microscope with you wherever you may be going.

TRAHERNE. Perhaps there are microscopes awaiting me there.

LUCILLA. Spirit microscopes for spirit microbes? You don't believe that, Basil.

TRAHERNE. I neither believe nor disbelieve. In all we can say of another life we are like children blind from birth, trying to picture the form and colours of the rainbow.

LUCILLA. But if the forms and colours we know are of no use to us, what comfort are we to find in formless, colourless possibilities? If we are freed from all human selfishness, shall I love my children more than any other woman's? Can I love a child I cannot kiss, that cannot look into my eyes and kiss me back again?

TRAHERNE. [*Starting up.*] Oh, Lucilla, don't!

LUCILLA. What do you mean?

TRAHERNE. Don't remind me of all we are losing! I meant to leave it all unspoken—the thought of h i m lying out there seemed to tie my tongue. But we have only one moment on this side of eternity. Lucilla, shall I go on?

[*After a perceptible pause,* LUCILLA *bows her head.*]

Do you think it is with a light heart that I turn my back upon the life of earth and all it might have meant for you and me—for you and me, Lucilla!

LUCILLA. Yes, Basil, for you and me.

TRAHERNE. Rather than live w i t h o u t you, I am glad to die w i t h you; but oh, what a wretched gladness compared with that of living with you and loving you! I wonder if you guess what it has meant to me, ever since we met at Dehra Dun, to see you as another man's wife, bound to him by ties I couldn't ask you to break. It has been hell, hell! [*Looking up with a mournful smile.*] My love has not been quite selfish, Lucilla, since I can say I really do love your children, though I know they have stood between me and heaven.

LUCILLA. Yes, Basil, I know. I have known from the beginning.

TRAHERNE. Oh, Lucilla, have we not been fools, fools? We have sacrificed to an idol as senseless as that—[*with a gesture towards the image*] all the glory and beauty of life! What do I care for a bloodless, shadowy life—life in the abstract, with all the senses extinct? Is there not something in the depths of our heart that cries out "We don't want it! Better eternal sleep!"

LUCILLA. Oh, Basil—you are going back to your own wisdom.

TRAHERNE. Wisdom! What has wisdom to say to love, thwarted and unfulfilled? You were right when you said that it is a mockery to speak of love without hands to clasp, without lips to kiss. We may be going to some pale parody of life; but in our cowardice we have killed love for ever and ever.

LUCILLA. No, Basil, don't call it cowardice. I, too, re-

gret—perhaps as much as you—that things were—as they were. But not even your love could have made up to me for my children.

[*A trumpet-blast is heard—a prolonged deep, wailing sound.*]

There is the signal! Good-bye, dear love.

[*She holds out her hands to him. They kiss and stand embraced, until, at a sound of tom-toms and a low muttered chant from behind the curtains, left, they part, and stand hand in hand, facing the doorway.*]

[*Suddenly, at a great shattering note from a gong, the curtains of the doorway part, and a procession of chanting Priests enters, all wearing fantastic robes and headdresses, and all, except the* CHIEF PRIEST, *masked. The* RAJA *follows them, also wearing a priestly headdress, and gorgeously robed. Behind him come three dark-robed and masked figures, carrying heavy swords. Musicians bring up the rear. The Priests group themselves round the throne.*]

RAJA. [*To* TRAHERNE *and* LUCILLA, *who are standing in front of the throne.*] May I trouble you to move a little aside? I am, for the moment, not a king, but a priest, and must observe a certain dignity. Ridiculous, isn't it?

[*They move over to the right of the throne. He advances in stately fashion and seats himself on it.*]

RAJA. [*To* LUCILLA.] Must I do violence to my feelings, Madam, by including you in the approaching ceremony? There is still time.

[LUCILLA *is silent.*]

We autocrats are badly brought up. We are not

accustomed to having our desires, or even our whims, thwarted.

TRAHERNE. [*Interrupting.*] Will you never cease tormenting this lady?

RAJA. [*Totally disregarding him.*] Remember my power. If I may not take you back to my palace as my Queen, I can send you back as my slave.

[*A pause.*]

Have you nothing to say?

LUCILLA. Nothing.

RAJA. I repeat my offer as to your children.

LUCILLA. I would die a hundred times rather than see them in your hands.

RAJA. Remember, too, that, if I so will it, you cannot save them by dying. I can have them kidnapped —or—I can have them killed.

[LUCILLA *shrieks.* TRAHERNE, *with a cry of "Devil" makes a leap at the* RAJA'S *throat, pinning him against the back of the throne. The Priests instantly pull* TRAHERNE *off, pinion him, and drag him over to the left. They talk furiously to each other, and the* CHIEF PRIEST *prostrates himself before the* RAJA, *apparently in urgent supplication. The* RAJA, *who is now to the left of the throne,* LUCILLA *remaining on the right, quits them with some difficulty, and then turns to* TRAHERNE.]

RAJA. Chivalrous but ill-advised, Dr. Traherne. I regret it, and so will you. My colleagues here insist that, as you have laid impious hands on the chief of their sacred caste, your death alone will not appease the fury of the Goddess. They insist on subjecting you to a process of expiation—a ritual of great antiquity—but—

TRAHERNE. You mean torture?

RAJA. Well—yes.

[LUCILLA *rushes forward with a cry.*]

Not you, Madam—not you—

LUCILLA. I must speak to you—speak to you alone! Send Dr. Traherne away.

TRAHERNE. Lucilla! What are you thinking of! Lucilla—!

[*The* RAJA *motions to the Priests, who do something to* TRAHERNE *which causes him to crumple up, and his voice dies away.*]

LUCILLA. I beg you—I beg you! One minute—no more!

[*The* RAJA *looks at her for a moment, then shrugs his shoulders and gives an order.* TRAHERNE *is dragged through the doorway, left.*]

[LUCILLA, *in her desperation, has rushed up the steps of the throne. She now sinks, exhausted, upon the end of the throne itself.*]

LUCILLA. Let him go, send him back to India unharmed, and—it shall be as you wish.

RAJA. Soho! You will do for your lover—to save him a little additional pain—what you would not do to have your children restored to you! Suppose I agree—would h e accept this sacrifice?

LUCILLA. No, no, he wouldn't—but he must have no choice. That is part of the bargain. Send him—bound hand and foot, if need be—down to Kashmir, and put him over the frontier—

RAJA. You don't care what he thinks of you?

LUCILLA. He will know what to think.

RAJA. And I too, Madam, know what to think. [*Kneeling with one knee on the throne, he seizes her by the shoulders and turns her face towards him.*]

Come, look me in the eyes and tell me that you honestly intend to fulfil your bargain! [*Her head droops.*] I knew it! You are playing with me! But the confiding barbarian is not so simple as you imagine. No woman has ever tried to fool me that has not repented it. You think, when you have to pay up, you will fob me off with your dead body. Let me tell you, I have no use for you dead—I want you with all the blood in your veins, with all the pride in that damned sly brain of yours. I want to make my plaything of your beauty, my mockery of your pride. I want to strip off the delicate English lady, and come down to the elemental woman, the handmaid and the instrument of man.

[*Changing his tone.*]

Come now, I'll make you a plain offer. I will put Dr. Traherne over the frontier, and, as they set him free, my people shall hand him a letter written by you at my dictation. You will tell him that you have determined to accept my protection and make this your home. Consequently you wish to have your children conveyed to you here—

LUCILLA. Never—never—never! I will make no bargain that involves my children.

RAJA. You see! You will give me no hostages for the fulfilment of your bond. But a pledge of your good faith I must have. For without a pledge, Madam, I don't believe in it one little bit.

LUCILLA. What pledge?

RAJA. Only one is left—Dr. Traherne himself. I may —though it will strain my power to the uttermost —save his life, while keeping him in prison. Then, when you have fulfilled your bond—fulfilled it to the uttermost, mark you!—when you have borne me

a child—I will let him go free. But the moment you attempt to evade your pledge, by death or by escape, I will hand him over to the priests to work their will with; and I will put no restraint upon their savage instincts.

[*Pause.*]

Choose, my dear lady, choose!

[*The subdued murmur of the crowd below, which has been faintly audible during the foregoing scene, ceases, and in the silence is heard a faint, but rapidly increasing, whirr and throb.*]

[LUCILLA, *who has been crouching on the steps of the throne, looks up slowly, hope dawning in her face. For a few seconds she says nothing, waiting to assure herself that she can believe her ears. Then she says in a low voice, with a sort of sob of relief:*]

LUCILLA. Aeroplanes! [*She springs up with a shriek.*] The aeroplanes! Basil! Basil! The aeroplanes! [*She rushes out through the doorway, left, thrusting aside the incoming Priests, who are too amazed to oppose her.*]

[*The* RAJA *does not at first alter his attitude but looks up and listens intently. The curtains shutting off the balcony at the back are violently torn apart by the guard outside, who shout to the* RAJA *and point upward. Sounds of consternation and terror proceed from the unseen crowd.*]

[*The* RAJA *goes to the back and looks out. At the same moment* LUCILLA *and* TRAHERNE *rush in from the doorway, left.*]

LUCILLA. See! See! They are circling lower and lower! Is it true, Basil? Are we saved?

TRAHERNE. Yes, Lucilla, we are saved.

LUCILLA. Oh, thank God! thank God! I shall see my babies again!

[*She sways, almost fainting.* TRAHERNE *supports her.*]

RAJA. So the Major lied like a gentleman! Good old Major! I didn't think he had it in him.

[*The Guards call his attention; he looks out from the balcony, and gives an order, then turns down again.*]

One of the machines has landed. An officer is coming this way—he looks a mere boy.

TRAHERNE. The conquerors of the air have all been mere boys.

RAJA. I have given orders that he shall be brought here unharmed. Perhaps I had better receive him with some ceremony.

[*He goes back to the throne and seats himself, cross-legged. At his command the Priests range themselves about him.*]

RAJA. You said just now, Dr. Traherne, that you were saved. Are you so certain of that?

TRAHERNE. Certain?

RAJA. How many men does each of these humming-birds carry?

TRAHERNE. Two or three, but—

RAJA. I counted six planes—say at the outside twenty men. Even my toy army can cope with that number.

[*There is a growing clamour outside. The* RAJA *gives an order to the Priest at the door, right. He throws it wide open.*]

[FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT CARDEW *saunters in, escorted by three soldiers.*]

RAJA. Who are you, sir?

CARDEW. One moment! [*Crosses to* LUCILLA, *who*

holds out both her hands. He takes them cordially but coolly.] Mrs. Crespin! I'm very glad we're in time. [*Turns to* TRAHERNE.] Dr. Traherne, I presume? [*Shakes hands with him.*] And Major Crespin?

TRAHERNE. Shot while transmitting our message.

CARDEW. I'm so sorry, Mrs. Crespin. [*To* TRAHERNE.] By whom? [TRAHERNE *indicates the* RAJA, *who has meanwhile watched the scene impassively.*]

RAJA. I am sorry to interrupt these effusions, but—

CARDEW. Who are you, sir?

RAJA. I am the Raja of Rukh. And you?

CARDEW. Flight-Lieutenant Cardew. I have the honour to represent his Majesty, the King-Emperor.

RAJA. The King-Emperor? Who is that, pray? We live so out of the world here, I don't seem to have heard of him.

CARDEW. You will in a minute, Raja, if you don't instantly hand over his subjects.

RAJA. His subjects? Ah, I see you mean the King of England. What terms does his Majesty propose?

CARDEW. We make no terms with cut-throats. [*Looks at his wrist watch.*] If I do not signal your submission within three minutes of our landing—

[*A bomb is heard to fall at some distance. Great consternation among the Priests, etc.*]

RAJA. [*Unperturbed.*] Ah! bombs!

CARDEW. Precisely.

RAJA. I fancied your Government affected some scruple as to the slaughter of innocent civilians.

CARDEW. There has been no slaughter—as yet. That bomb fell in the ravine, where it could do no harm. So will the next one—

[*Bomb—nearer. Increasing hubbub without.*]

But the third—well if you're wise you'll throw up the sponge, and there won't b e a third.

RAJA. Throw up the sponge, Lieutenant—? I didn't quite catch your name?

CARDEW. Cardew.

RAJA. Ah, yes, Lieutenant Cardew. Why on earth should I throw up the sponge? Your comrades up yonder can no doubt massacre quite a number of my subjects—a brave exploit!—but when they've spent their thunderbolts, they'll just have to fly away again—if they can. A bomb may drop on this temple, you say? In that case, you and your friends will escort me—in fragments—to my last abode. Does that prospect allure you? I call your bluff, Lieutenant Cardew.

[*A third bomb—very loud.*]

[*The Priests rush up to the* RAJA, *and fall before him in panic-stricken supplication, with voluble remonstrances, pointing to the Idol in the background. The* RAJA *hesitates for a moment, then proceeds:*]

RAJA. My priests, however, have a superstitious dread of these eggs of the Great Roc. They fear injury to the Sacred Image. For myself, I am always averse from bloodshed. You may, if you please, signal to your squadron commander my acceptance of your terms.

CARDEW. I thought you would come to reason. [*Shaking out his flag in preparation for signalling, he hurries across to where the white beam of a searchlight is visible outside the doorway, right. He disappears for a moment.*]

RAJA. This comes of falling behind the times. If I had had anti-aircraft guns—

TRAHERNE. Thank your stars you hadn't!

CARDEW. [*Returning.*] All clear for the moment, Raja. You have no further i m m e d i a t e consequences to fear.

RAJA. What am I to conclude from your emphasis on i m m e d i a t e?

CARDEW. [*After whispering to* TRAHERNE.] I need scarcely remind you, sir, that you can only hand over the b o d y of one of your prisoners.

RAJA. Major Crespin murdered a faithful servant of mine. His death at my hands was a fair act of war.

CARDEW. His Majesty's Government will scarcely view it in that light.

RAJA. His Majesty's Government has today, I believe, taken the lives of three kinsmen of mine. Your side has the best of the transaction by four lives to one.

CARDEW. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Will you assign us an escort through the crowd?

RAJA. Certainly. [*Gives an order to the officer of regulars, who hurries out, right.*] The escort will be here in a moment. [*To* LUCILLA *and* TRAHERNE.] It only remains for me to speed the parting guest. I hope we may one day renew our acquaintance—Oh, not here! I plainly foresee that I shall have to join the other Kings in Exile. Perhaps we may meet at Homburg or Monte Carlo, and talk over old times. Ah, here is the escort.

[*The escort has formed at the door, right.* TRAHERNE, LUCILLA *and* CARDEW *cross to it, the* RAJA *following them up.*]

RAJA. Good-bye, dear lady. I lament the Major's end. Perhaps I was hasty; but, you know, "'Tis better to have loved and lost," etc. And oh—Mrs. Cres-

pin! [*As she is going out,* LUCILLA *looks back at him with horror.*] My love to the children!

[*The Priests and others are all clustered on the balcony, looking at the aeroplanes. The* RAJA *turns back from the door, lights a cigarette at the brazier, takes a puff, and says:*]

Well, well—she'd probably have been a damned nuisance.

CURTAIN

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THE GREEN GODDESS

A Play in Four Acts

By WILLIAM ARCHER

"I WAS anxious on the first night of William Archer's play, *The Green Goddess.* For many years I have known him: many of his books I have reviewed, including *'Poets of the Younger Generation'* (now out of print), and *'Playmaking,'* which is not out of print, and for which there is a constant demand by budding playwrights. In it he tells us how not to write plays; and he confesses that he could not write a play on any terms. But he can write dramatic criticism. No one better. Walkley, Bernard Shaw, Max Beerbohm are different but they are not better than William Archer, who has seen and written temperately and truthfully about every London play of importance for thirty years and more.

"I was anxious because this is William's First Play, and I could not help recalling the literary men—Thomas Hardy, Henry James, George Moore, Joseph Conrad—who have essayed the stage, and who have not triumphed. Lo, before the end of the first act my anxiety was over. I turned to Belinda and said, 'This is all right.' At the end of the second act I said, 'This is a money-getter.' At the end of the third act I said, 'Archer has put it over.' At the end of the fourth act I cheered with the rest.

"This play is the work of a craftsman."

—"Q. R." in *The Christian Science Monitor.*

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